Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs History Project

LOUISE SCHAFFNER ARMSTRONG

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background
- Born Martha Louise Schaffner in Japan
- American Missionary Parents
- Raised in Lancaster PA and Japan
- Wellesley College
- Researcher for Time and Life
- Clare Booth Luce
- Joined the Foreign Service 1943

Madras, India; Consular Officer 1944-1947
- Environment
- British influence
- Missionaries
- Gandhi
- Consular invoices
- Reporting
- Social life
- Foreign Service Examination
- American seamen
- Indian Independence

Commissioned as Foreign Service Officer 1947

Prague, Czechoslovakia; Rotation Officer 1948-1949
- Coup d'etat
- Environment
- Contacts
- Declared persona non grata
- Czech claims against Armstrong (Schaffner)
- Political reporting
- Masaryk death
- Communist influence

Palermo, Italy; Consular Officer 1949-1950
- Citizenship cases
- Mafia
- Visas
- Environment
- Marauders
- Personalities

Further Comments on India
- Official travel in India
- India skills
- Contacts
- Missionaries
- Charity
- Madras environment
- Ashram visits
- Pondicherry visit
- Language
- Mysore jungle
- Women

Further Comments on Prague
- Anti-American environment
- Living accommodations
- Security
- Czech informers
- Police harassment
- Auschwitz visit

Montreal, Canada; Vice Consul; Economic/Commercial Officer 1950-1953
- Markets
- Environment
- Social life

Ottawa, Canada; 1953-1955
- Anti-Americanism
- French Canadians
- Industry
- American products
- US “Cultural Invasion”

Geneva, Switzerland; INR representative to Tariff Conference 1956
- Italians and Austrians

University of California, Berkeley; Advanced Economic Study 1956-1957

State Department; United Kingdom and Canada Affairs 1957-1959
Canadian issues

Marriage and Resignation 1959
Married Willis Armstrong, FSO

Ottawa, Canada; Wife of Deputy Chief of Mission 1959-1962
Ambassador and Staff
Environment
Relations
Canadian officials
Environmental issues
President Kennedy's visit
Estimation of John Diefenbaker
Sharing military defense

INTERVIEW

[Note: Mrs. Armstrong was unable to edit her interview before her death.]

Q: This is tape one, side one with Louise Armstrong. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Today is January 13, 2000. Well, can we start at the beginning, can you tell me when and where you were born and something about your parents?

ARMSTRONG: Yes. I was born in Tokyo, November 16, 1917. My parents were missionaries to Japan. They had gone to Japan two years before I was born. They spent the two years, those two years in Tokyo, where they were taking extensive, intensive language training in Japanese. They were later moved to one of our mission posts north of Sendai, Aizuwakamatsu. In due course my father would have been the principal of a girl's college in Sendai, which was sponsored by our church.

Q: Sendai is in northern Honshu?

ARMSTRONG: Yes. This is the, what was then the German Reformed Church, or the Reformed Church of the United States, as distinct from the Dutch Reformed Church, which had basically the same theology. But because it settled in Manhattan and is relatively well-off, from a real estate standpoint, it didn't have to merge, whereas the German Reformed Church made a number of mergers and it's finally the United Church of Christ.

Q: What was your family's name?

ARMSTRONG: My father was Paul Franklin Schaffner. And my mother was Sarah Hording Schaffner. S-c-h-a-ff-n-e-r.

Q: What were your mother and father's backgrounds?

ARMSTRONG: My father was from Harrisburg, and his father was a lawyer. And he went to Franklin and Marshall Academy in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. And then to Franklin and Marshall College. And then to seminary, the Reformed Church Seminary in Lancaster.

And my mother was a graduate of high school in Lancaster, and had gone on to study voice at a conservatory in Philadelphia. But I couldn't tell you if it's still in existence. And she was a schoolteacher and a professional singer. She sang at churches, whenever they did "The Messiah" or something like that, she would be the soprano soloist.

Q: As a child, did you grow up in Japan?

ARMSTRONG: I spent the first six years in Japan. I celebrated my sixth birthday on the way to the United States. My parents were given a furlough, as they called it, every seven years. The seven years expired, and we set out to come home. And we came the long way, that is, across the Pacific, and stopped various interesting places. I celebrated my sixth birthday in Paris.

Q: How long did you stay in the United States?

ARMSTRONG: We were due a furlough of two years. And during those two years, my parents worked out of Lancaster. My father had to go about preaching and recruiting and of course raising money for the church. And my mother did her bit by going along and singing the solos at the various churches. But that was the first year. The second year they were on their own and were entitled to do what they wanted, preferably something to further their career. My father studied at Boston University. And my mother studied at the Peabody Conservatory in Boston. And we lived in the suburb of Boston -- Winthrop.

Q: So by this time, you were eight years old?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, so that I was eight years old when I returned to Japan with my parents. And it wasn't long before my father took ill, and I think he died within six months. He developed an acute form of diabetes, and there was no insulin. My mother thought it best to come back to her home, which was Lancaster. So I grew up in Lancaster.

Q: So you were in Lancaster until about when? This would be, we're talking about –

ARMSTRONG: Until I went to college, which was 1934.

Q: What was life like in school, with your mother and all in Lancaster?

ARMSTRONG: Very pleasant. My mother is fond of saying that Lancaster is a good place in which to grow up. And she was quite right. There were several planes of society there. There were simple folk who still spoke with an accent they brought back from the Old Country, not just the Pennsylvania Dutch, but some of the English-speaking people. Then there were other more sophisticated types and old families. It was a nice mix of people, and it was very safe, very sedate, God-fearing. And it had Franklin and Marshall College and the Seminary to give it some intellectual stimulation.

Q: Well now, where did you go to grammar school?

ARMSTRONG: In Lancaster, in public schools.

Q: What was it like then?

ARMSTRONG: I don't know what to say about that, but I started at the local primary school, and this is after I was aged six initially. Then six to seven, I was in the local primary school. Seven to eight I was in the school in Winthrop, Massachusetts. And then when I came back, I went into third grade, I guess. I'd been taught by the Calvert Method when I was overseas.

Q: It's a correspondence course.

ARMSTRONG: Correspondence, right, correspondence method, which was a very good school. And I skipped a grade or two because I was in advance of my classes in that respect. Then [I] moved from that school to a school that went up through grade six to eight. Then nine to ten, still another school. Then finished in high school two more years. It was an odd way they segregated the years. But I had primary school and junior high and high school.

Q: Particularly as we move into junior high, high school, were there any subjects you were particularly interested in?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I always enjoyed English, and I tolerated math and I tolerated Physics, things of that sort. I didn't have much opportunity with history, political science. They were weak, very weak in their teaching of that.

Q: How about during, a good part of this period you were in high school, in 1929, the Depression hit. Did that have much effect?

ARMSTRONG: Oh, very much so. I don't think we were nearly as affected as some people. Because somehow my mother had a certain amount of funding from the church

for the children. She had no insurance, other than that. But the church provided for the children, and she managed with that and her singing and teaching to keep us fairly comfortable in a pleasant house in downtown Lancaster. When we got older, she realized it had become more expensive, so she went afield to try and earn some money on a regular basis. And she took a course in journalism at the University of Wisconsin in the summer and came back and went into the advertising department of one of the local department stores. And then later [she] moved to the advertising department of the Armstrong Cork Products Company, which is not Armstrong World Products Company. That and a Hamilton Watch and Staley Silk Mill and an umbrella factory were the principal employers of people in those days.

Q: Did you read a lot, on your own?

ARMSTRONG: I did, but I wasn't conscious of being bookish. I was much more interested in being out of doors. I was a tomboy. I climbed trees and played baseball and did things like that.

Q: Obviously, the financial constraints and all, what did you think about going away to university, college?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I wanted to do it. And I had probably the option of going to a local college, like Millersville State Teachers College, which is now a full-fledged college. But we had friends who had gone to Wellesley, and they encouraged me in that direction. And I received some sponsorship from them and also a scholarship.

Q: So you were in Wellesley from '34 to what?

ARMSTRONG: '38.

Q: '38. What was Wellesley like then?

ARMSTRONG: Delightful. Trouble is, it was too much fun, too distracting. A beautiful campus. The pleasures of being in a community of people who were in some fashion interesting or stimulating. It was great. Winters were splendid. Springs were beautiful. I enjoyed it.

Q: Were you taking a lot of the Harvard courses?

ARMSTRONG: No, no, that had not started. But we never had any reason to think that we were not well served by the faculty. Talking with people from Harvard, whom I knew, who were my contemporaries, I didn't think they were being taught any better than I was.

Q: Oh, probably not, because you were probably getting, it wasn't a, you were probably getting a more concentrated set of studies.

ARMSTRONG: Oh, yes, we didn't have the tutorial system, which would have been nice. I think I would have enjoyed that enormously. But we had excellent professors.

Q: Where did, was there a missionary carryover at Wellesley at that time, sort of a missionary mafia?

ARMSTRONG: No, I wouldn't say so. There was one other girl with missionary parentage in my dormitory, and I never knew any other. But we did have foreign students, and of course we had the Madame Chiang Kai-shek class heritage.

Q: I was going to say, I think of the, what was it, the Koo Sisters in Wellington, I'm not sure, whatever the sisters were…

ARMSTRONG: I know; I'm groping for it myself. But we didn't have a great deal of that at Wellesley. We had a lot of foreign students. I remember one girl, who was from the Middle East, a friend of mine, and she said, "You wash your hair in the wintertime?" Now I believe it's very different. They depend very heavily on foreign students.

Q: I wouldn't be surprised. What was your major?

ARMSTRONG: English literature, [with a] minor in English Composition.

Q: Any particular field in English literature?

ARMSTRONG: No.

Q: Were any of the –

ARMSTRONG: I took the usual history and economics as well.

Q: Were any of the sort of, during this period was the period of the New Deal and all that, were there some sharp debates, I can see Wellesley, with people coming out of families, many of them from the well-to-do, who really weren't great fans of Roosevelt.

ARMSTRONG: There wasn't a lot of political sentiment on the campus that I was aware of. We didn't have a lot of meetings that I was aware of. It had its clubs, which was not a sorority, on campus. There were a lot of clubs, but I never felt that they were anything but social. It was a period of approaching war in Europe, and I remember feeling very strongly that I didn't want American boys to have to be in that war. I changed my tune in later life.

Q. But that was very strong then?

ARMSTRONG: It was very strong.

Q. Well, getting out in 1938, where were you pointed?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I moved into first, the Hamilton Watch Factory, first job that I could get. And that was sorting artificial diamonds for watches, a very simpleminded job. Then I worked in the Science Press, which was the press, which published, the official organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the AAAS.

Q. Scientific America?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, Scientific America, things of that sort. I'm sure they've moved to other publishing houses, but this is where a lot of it was done. And I had the job of proof and manuscript reader.

Q. This seemed to be the prime occupation of graduates of the Seven Sisters schools, being first-rate proofreaders at the beginning.

ARMSTRONG: I'm sure it's true because you either did that or you went to Katie Gibbs.

Q. Yeah, Katie Gibbs being the secretarial school.

ARMSTRONG: Right. At any rate, I wanted to go to New York and see what I could do for myself there. So I eventually set off with one or two introductions. It took me a while to get into anything very solid. But I did finally work for Time and Life. And it was while I was there that, as a so-called researcher…

As a researcher you went along with the photographer and got all the materials that related to the story that was being shot, or you helped to evolve the story in the first place, the concept of it and then went along with the photographer. But you also, if you worked in some areas, the responsibility was to check the accuracy of the stories that were churned out by the writers, but since some of them were pretty, how would you say, high-flown in their style, making or developing theses as they went along, you found you had to reign them in a little bit on a factual basis.

And I did have the experience of reading what Clare Booth Luce sent back from a trip she made to the Far East, during the war this was, when she joined up with the Flying Tigers and General Stilwell and people like that and made stops, hop skipping around the Pacific. And her reports would come back, and I had the job of reading them from a factual standpoint. And basically, she was pretty reliable, a little fast and loose, but pretty reliable. However, when it came to names, I felt I needed some type of corroboration for the spelling, the names and things like that. Very easy to make mistakes in recording from the scene. So when she would get back from these trips, I would call her at the Waldorf and talk to her, rather I talked to secretary, and I'd say --would you ask Mrs. Luce if she can confirm this or corroborate that or spell this and so forth? One day I called and I got right through to the lady herself. And she said to me, "Mrs. Armstrong, what have I done wrong now?" Very pleasant lady. She wasn't being nasty.

Q: Were you initiated into sort of the unique Time writing style at that point?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I never did any actual writing. It was while I was working for Life magazine, which at that point was developing a magazine for the armed forces, which would not only give them news but also would help them in identifying foreign and American airplanes, tanks, ships and so forth – a recognition training process. And that took me to Washington on a number of occasions. And it seemed to me everybody was going overseas except me, so I began to look into the possibility of doing something overseas. And I heard from one friend of mine that he was being hired by ANRA, I think it was.

I decided to walk into the State Department, while I was down there, and I asked if I could have an appointment with somebody in foreign service personnel. In due course I was introduced to the chief of foreign service personnel, and that was in the Old Executive Office Building. He waved me to my seat and said he understood I was interested in the foreign service. I said, "Yes, but not in an officer capacity." And I said, "Is that possible?" Well he tilted himself back in his swivel chair and put the tips of his fingers together and said, "Conceivably." And so somewhat to my astonishment I discovered that State Department security was investigating me. My boss in New York would say, "What's going on here?" And the woman who owned the apartment where I was staying, she was frightened out of her wits because security people had come to interrogate her about me.

And then they made me the offer of joining the Foreign Service Auxiliary, which you've probably heard about. And that was for, on the duration of the emergency basis. And we were given a course of sprouts in everything under the sun, a couple of months of this. And I wasn't very long into it before an announcement was made of three posts open for bids. And I was afraid I'd get something like Tegucigalpa, so when I heard that these three posts were open for bids, I pricked up my ears. One was Afghanistan; one was Jerusalem; one was Madras. I didn't think I'd be considered for Kabul, and I thought Jerusalem might be pretty depressing. And I'd read A Passage to India, E.M. Forster, so I had romantic ideas about India, so therefore I offered my services there. And then as I understand it, the Department made little discreet inquiries among people who had served in India, old India hands, as to whether this young woman would go down in the vice consul capacity in Madras, and they seemed to think there was no problem. So I was the first woman officer in India. And before I left there were about six others gathered around various consular posts.

Q: You went to Madras when?

ARMSTRONG: I arrived in January '44.

Q: How did you get there?

ARMSTRONG: I sailed out of Hoboken on a passenger cargo vessel that was the Hurg Silverstar, Norwegians vessel. And we traveled in convoy, across the Atlantic, until we got to the Mediterranean by which time it was Marc Nostrum, we were free of the convoy business so we moved faster. And [we] went into Karachi. Apart from Suez, that was the only stop we made. At Karachi, I was expected, that is my boss-to-be in Madras had been in touch with the consular general in Karachi, and he'd made all kinds of plans for me, which made me fly Tada Airlines to Madras. Now Tada Airlines is a little bi-plane with about six passengers. Had to stop over in Secunderabad, which is the twin city of Hyderabad, where Tada had its own little hotel, airport hotel arrangements.

And interestingly enough I noticed among the half dozen passengers that there was an older middle-aged woman with graying hair, black graying hair, who wore a sari but was plainly not Indian. Olive skin and the sari and these leather shoes that you wear in North India, with a turned-up toe. And I thought this is interesting, she is what they say has "gone native." But she was an interesting, arresting figure, accompanied by a younger man who spoke English as well as whatever he spoke to her in. I read her name off the sign-in roster when we got to the hotel, and she was Maria Montessori. She was traveling around India fulfilling speaking engagements with her nephew doing the interpreting.

Q: Well, Maria Montessori established this preschool system-

ARMSTRONG: Everywhere.

Q: -which is everywhere.

ARMSTRONG: Very big in India, or was. I'm sure it's still there. So anyway, one flew by way of Hyderabad, Secunderabad, overnight there. With nothing better to do, a group of us went into the local bazaar at night and that was fascinating. The craftsman were working by charcoal fires, beautiful stuff, all very inexpensive. I bought a dozen bracelets.

And then the next morning we set off for Madras. And there it was understood that my boss-to-be, he would meet me. It was a two officer post, Madras. And Roy Bauer, who had been in the post for some time [and] was very much settled in there, was to have met me. And then a message reached me at the airport that he couldn't leave the office and would I please take a taxi in to the hotel where I was registered and then meet him for lunch at The Madras Club. I found a fellow passenger who was going in; we shared a cab. Looking out of the plane as we approached Madras, it looked very arid and empty, and I thought, "Geez, two three years here, can I stand it?" Then as we drove in to the town, it happened to be after the monsoon so it was a lot greener than it might have been, in fact a lot of green paddy fields everywhere, but kind of a rundown situation. Everything you saw looked in a state of decay, if not from dry weather then from humid weather. And not very reassuring. And part way into town, in the middle of the country, the taxi broke down. The driver managed to flag another car. That car towed us and just as we approached the near middle of the town, the tow rope broke. I finally got to my hotel.

Q: A great introduction!

ARMSTRONG: That's right. Having arrived at the hotel, I then went on to the Madras Club. First thing my boss did was order me a gimlet, my first experience with gimlets. And with a British-Indian club. It was really very agreeable, and just what I needed was a drink at that point.

Q: You were there from 1944 to --?

ARMSTRONG: '47, September '47. I left one month after Indian Independence.

Q: What was Madras like at that time? Particularly when you just arrived, still wartime?

ARMSTRONG: Yes. Well first thing that Mr. Bauer did, over a drink and then over lunch, was to explain the social situation to me. Quite clearly I was not to drop any bricks or make any gaffes. The society was dominated by the British Civil Service, ICS, Indian Civil Service really. There was a British governor and his aides were all British. The chiefs of all the administrative offices were British. And then there were Britishers who were there in business, import-export, manufacturers, cotton and things like that. And there were British military.

And the situation was such socially, there was a housing shortage, that is, a housing shortage of the West and England. I'm sure there was always a housing shortage for Indians. So the people doubled up, and as my boss explained to me, sometimes the husband would be sent home and couldn't get back, having left his wife behind. And there would be somebody else who needed a place to live, so they would have a paying guest system. And you would have some interesting situations where So-and-so was sharing a house with Lady So-and-so, but they didn't have the same last name. And he just wanted to let me understand that such situations existed, from the social point of view so I wouldn't be misled.

He also said that there was one particular charming younger woman who attended all the social functions, as a somewhat unattached woman, I think she was separated from her husband. But she was hired by the British Intelligence, so that anything that got to her ears went straight to Intelligence. They had put her in that situation because so many soldiers would come through, officers through Madras, and they would have time on their hands looking for recreation and go to the several clubs that were open to them. And if they talked too much, she would be there to pick it up. And that was among some other responsibilities I'm sure.

He also told me in local correspondence I should be very careful of what I said because there were a number of British housewives who were employed to read this kind of thing. So my letters would invariably be screened.

Then there was the missionary community, which was very significant. We had about a thousand missionaries in the consular district, which included the state of Hyderabad, Mysore and Travancore, three Indian states - they all have different names now - and Madras, Presidency as it was called then. So missionaries were scattered all over this south Indian area, which was really the lower half of the Indian peninsula. And Roy Bauer was on very good terms with them; they enjoyed coming and chatting with him. He was a very approachable, easy conversationalist. He had a remarkable faculty for getting happily along with the British, the stuffiest Britishers, because he'd served in England, he'd served in Singapore, he was quite comfortable with British ways. In fact he would correct me from time to time. I was not to say "stupid," I was to say "schtupid," can you hear the difference? Because that's the way the British said [it]. He was also very comfortable with the local American community, which was small. But the missionaries were a great source of intelligence for us.

We would report on all kinds of things as they happened in our area. We would report, you see we didn't have an embassy yet in Delhi, we had the personal representative of the United States. Then in due course when it was clear that we were going to have an embassy, we had a chargé. And the first ambassador I broke in for, I'll have to take time on that, but never mind….We would send these reports back to both to Delhi and to Washington, for what they were worth. Basically we didn't have a great deal of trouble in south India. The problems that arose were chiefly in the north. Because we had a very modest Muslim community. They gave nobody any trouble, and nobody troubled them. We had some other interesting curiosities, but mostly it was a very stable community in that sense.

Q: Were we looking at the Indian Congress Party and the Gandhi general movement?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, we had a close friend in a woman congressman, and I made friends with another woman who had been a congresswoman. We had visits from Gandhi, from time to time. He would come down. I shared a platform with him. By a platform I mean a raised dais in the center of a crowd with people all around who had come for holy sight of the great man.

Q: I'm sure in making the namostay.

ARMSTRONG: That's right. The interesting thing for me was one heard so much about his fasting and his general self sacrifice. But when I saw him in person, I never saw somebody who was better fleshed out than he was. I understood in his fasting, when it took place, included in his diet orange juice and goat's milk, which was a lot better than most Indians had by way of a good diet. And when he traveled third class, in the third class car - third class in India had nothing but the bench around the periphery of the car, with most people sitting on the floor - this third class car was mostly Gandhi and his party. So it wasn't as if he had to sleep on the floor if he didn't want to. I admired him a lot, but he didn't have any great time for Americans. I suspect only for Britishers with whom he had to do business.

Q: As vice consul, what were your jobs? What were you doing?

ARMSTRONG: I had a certain amount of rubber stamping of invoices, enormous amount of invoices. Of rosters of port, and during the war time, we had a lot of American ships come in, so there was some so-called shipping. But since we didn't have a Coast Guard there, if there was any serious problem, we'd refer them to Calcutta or to Ceylon, to Colombo. Because you always had incidents on cargo ships where there was some kind of a fracas going on. Some seaman was a problem or some captain was a problem. But I didn't have to deal with that type of thing directly. The invoicing was big. There was a community of Americans working in Bangalore with the Hindustan Aircraft Corporation, which was the beginning in the sense of, Bangalore is now the "silicon valley" of India. Bangalore Aircraft Corporation serviced the codas and other planes –

Q: The codas being the DC-3.

ARMSTRONG: That's right. And also serviced military aircraft. And some which later flew the hump. We had a group of American technicians and engineers working there which inevitably cohabited with Anglo-Indian woman. And inevitably there were children and some consular matters involving them. And we had consular matters involving the American community, of which I said we had about 1,000. And then I was expected to mingle socially, which was very agreeable. And as I say do reporting. The more commercial economic reporting would be done by the chief Indian clerk, but it would go out under my name because I would report it. We did oil seeds reporting and reporting on coconut products and things of that sort, mainly for the Department of Agriculture I think, to some extent for Commerce. And any political reporting that we could sniff out.

Q: Was the Consul sort of under the instructions to watch this Indian Independence movement closely?

ARMSTRONG: Well, we just assumed we were under instructions if we weren't, and [we'd] report anything we thought was worthwhile. But as I say there wasn't a great deal going on in south India. South India was just moving with the times.

Q: How about the war effort? Was it your impression that the Indians you got to know, were they with the war effort or did they feel it was a British war?

ARMSTRONG: Oh, distinctly detached. In fact there was such a thing as the Indian National Army, which was working with the Japanese.

Q: In Burma.

ARMSTRONG: Well, also in India. And the daughter of this congresswoman was involved in that. She wasn't living in Madras very much, so it was just quietly spoken about. Yes she was very much involved.

Q: What about your contact with Indians? The British were still in charge, but was there an Indian class that you –

ARMSTRONG: Yes, there was an Indian community that one would regard as just as easy to mingle with as the British. One of the things I liked to do was to escape from the domain of the Raj now and again. You knew that if you spent all your time with Indians that it would create a bad impression, so you had to be a little careful. But I had quite a number of Indian friends who were what you would call upper class, prosperous, and I enjoyed learning about India through them. They provided opportunities like the missionaries. The missionaries were much closer to the Indians and the officials, of course.

Q: How about at the end of the war, which would be August of '45, did that change things at all?

ARMSTRONG: It didn't make too much difference immediately in south India. In north India, there were already riots, even before Indian independence. I went up, I joined the Foreign Service in the auxiliary, and then I was prepared to take the written examinations. They were provided, at a certain point, by courier. And I was going to be able to sit in my own office and take the examination with my supervisor next door, so to speak. The courier was a day late, after I'd done my best to bone up for this examination, I found I had to wait for the next one to come along because it was considered, that particular examination had been, what's the word you want?

Q: Compromised?

ARMSTRONG: Compromised. So when I finally took it, which was about six months later, and was discovered to have passed it I was told that I would be interviewed by a panel--a traveling panel. A traveling panel came to Bombay, and I went up to Bombay for that occasion. There was a very well-known man, named Joe Green, and everybody said he would the holy terror. And it turned out he was a very fatherly type. At any rate I passed the orals, as far as I could tell, I think they told me at the time. Then I had to pass the physical. The consulate in Bombay sent me to a doctor that they had in mind, and I found myself stark naked jumping up and down on one foot and then the other for this guy. No nurses or nothing. You put up with a lot in the Foreign Service.

From there I went on to Kashmir. My mother, by the way, had come to India to join me about two-thirds of the way through. She and an American woman whose husband had been Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) secretary, the three of us were going to Kashmir together. She and my mother went on ahead, and I went on from Bombay. One went part of the way by train, up to Peshawar, and then a bus from there up to Srinagar. And I could see burning villages on the ridges across the way, at that time in the spring of '47. There was plenty of trouble already.

Then when my mother and I came back we traveled separately from our friend, Marie Buck. We got on board a train with a compartment reserved for us you couldn't lock. The lock was faulty. And under normal circumstances you wouldn't feel too worried about this. But under the circumstances, it wasn't very reassuring. And at every point on the Indian railway's journey, they would stop and there would be a great hubbub of crowds on the platform. That was very characteristic, especially in North India. Crowded platforms where people would eat, sell tea, sell this and that and eat fast foods of their kind. Any hour of day or night; the Indian clock is continuous. So I found us in this unlockable compartment, and I piled everything I could think of in terms of luggage. And I suggested that my mother take the lower berth and I spent half the night screaming at people to get away from the door, that it was private, that it was locked and so forth, ready to leap on anybody who did push their way in. Well people pushed, but nobody pushed their way in. But that was a situation I wouldn't have encountered in south India. There was more turbulence and unruliness up there.

Now in south India there was one episode that gave us concern really. A very fine man who was a member of the high court, the Madras High Court, a Britisher, Justice Byers - he and his wife were delightful, I enjoyed their hospitality more than once - he for some reason had a revolver with him driving back from the high courts, which were at the far end of town from where he lived at the other end of town. His car was being pelted by boys throwing stones and it unnerved him, and he thought the best thing to do was to fire a warning shot. And he got out his pistol and he fired a warning shot and it hit a stone wall and the bullet ricocheted and killed a boy. I have never seen a British community so upset, and I'd never seen a man so shunned after that. He just didn't stay in Madras. He lost his position, and he was out of there. He retired to Vancouver.

Q: Did you find that there was a certain amount of tension between you and the American members, particularly you and the British community and you know, our general feeling is anti-colonial? Or had we sort of been absorbed into the colonial society?

ARMSTRONG: I think my experience was in fact colored by the fact of Roy Bauer, who was very pro-British. Now mind you he was objective at the same time. And the more I saw of the situation in south India, the more I was satisfied that the Indian Civil Service was really a very well-intentioned and well-organized civil service and very competent, in the sense that the young officer would go out to a large district so he would be the only one there and somehow could be responsible for local justice, local taxes and everything else. I thought they handled the situation well. The railroads were their creation. And everything India has today, to my way of thinking, is due to a very good colonial period. When I was with Indians who were chafing at the British overrule, I could be sympathetic with them as well.

But I have to say I also admired the British. Now individual British senior people could be a little stuffy. An American was not always considered to be of the same class and status. But happily Mr. Bauer was very well-established, and that made a difference in

their acceptance of me. I was the subject of a certain amount of local gossip, which was the principal problem I had I would say, because here I was, an unattached woman, circulating [with] a largely identified group of people, some Indians. So my name was often being associated with somebody or other, often with somebody I'd never heard of. Again, the only thing to do was to forget about it, to laugh at it.

Q: Well did you find, when you came into the Foreign Service, were you being warned this isn't the place for a woman and that kind of thing?

ARMSTRONG: Well I was only warned about the problem of Madras being a port and unruly seamen would be coming in. So I have to tell my unruly seamen story. In fact one man, I think he's the first person I talked to in the state department, said, "You know, if you go to a place like Madras, I know of a woman foreign service vice consul who kept a big monkey wrench on her desk and any time she felt threatened she would rattle the monkey wrench.

Well that didn't happen in my case, but in one instance when there was an American cargo vessel in town--and by the way we had constant vessels in town because there was a big buildup for an invasion of Japan and there was a base called Avodi, which was outside of Madras, so we had shipload after shipload of aircraft parts, you name it. And these ships would frequently, almost invariably, be American vessels. Well one day this chap came in and, shirt open down to his belt buckle, he sits himself on the chair in front of my office and my desk and throws one leg over the arm of the chair and leans back and says, "Say, what is there to do in this town anyway?" Bauer had seen him come in. I talked to him – there was the Gimkana Club he could go to, and there were movies. I was scared to death he'd ask me for a date, and I'd have to say no thank you. And he began to study me and he said, "Say, you look familiar, what's your name?" And I told him Louise Schaffner. He says, "I went to school with you, I went to grade school with you. My name's Panny Beanzirfer." And I remembered Panny Beanzirfer, and I said, "I'm going to have to write my grandmother about you." At that point, we had a few other words and then he took off. Roy Bauer couldn't believe it. He couldn't believe it. I found it hard to believe too.

Q: Did you have to get seamen out of jail and things like that?

ARMSTRONG: That we left to the Coast Guard. They would come in, the captain would come in with some of the problems. Roy Bauer would talk to him and advise him what we could and couldn't do. Mainly we should ship them off to the next port. We also had problems with the local madam because these American seamen would come in and tear the joint apart. I got such a kick out of that. She would come in in this black dress, in the middle of the Madras summer heat and sit down in his office. He was very polite and very bland. He told her, "So sorry. Nothing we could do. Take it up with the police."

Q: Sometimes it's handy to have good relations with the local madams because they can sometimes keep Americans out of, they can sort of inform the Consul before they inform

the police.

ARMSTRONG: I dare say. I don't know of any case like that coming up. Mostly it was just these guys who would get drunk and raise hell.

Q: You say you left there in '47?

ARMSTRONG: Yes. Incidentally, I'll tell you about Indian independence in Madras. The date was the 15th, and it was at midnight because the 14th was an unlucky [day]. Or the settlement with Mountbatten fell to the 15th. But the sky showed that the 15th was an inauspicious day. So Indian independence was officially effective as of midnight. Nehru was the one who organized it this way. At any rate that night the whole downtown Madras was, of course, ablaze with lights and sounds and music and dancing and what, I don't remember exactly. But the governor of Madras, Sir Archibald Nigh, who was later to become the first British High Commissioner, he had been deputy chief of the imperial general staff during the war, which meant that he was a senior military man. And he was a splendid man. And his wife was very interested in everything Indian. She made a point of taking part in charities, which were for the benefit of the Indians. The two of them and their, his aide, and my mother was invited, not me, my mother, drove down to midtown Georgetown, which was the busy part of the Madras harbor area to enjoy the celebrations. And nobody laid a hand on them. It was in a jeep as a matter of fact. It wasn't in the official car, it was in a jeep.

Q. A jeep, open.

ARMSTRONG: An open jeep.

Q: Now, what was the feeling from Bauer and yourself about [unknown word] India?

ARMSTRONG: I think most Americans felt that India was entitled to independence. One's servants were very upset because they saw their established way of life as crumbling. I think India did deteriorate, initially. And whether it has in some fashion ever recovered, I doubt. I'm told I would see India very much changed. And I'm sure I will; it would be magnificent, the changes. But also you know all the troubles of India at this point too. So when the British left, they left a good system, but the system was disbanded.

Q: In '47 where did you go?

ARMSTRONG: In '47 I went on home leave, and my appointment was to be Praja. And I thought when I saw that, my gosh that must be in Latin America, [but] Praja's a name for Prague. There's a place, Paraj, I believe in Brazil. And I was confusing that in my mind. Well I found out differently. I had home leave, and I had consultation. And I spent some time in the department talking to people who were working on that area. And I was told that Steinhardt had just been there on his home leave, the summer of '47, and had talked everywhere about Czechoslovakia being the bridge between east and west. Literally,

nobody was alerted to the possibility of a coup and that was September, October, November, December. I arrived in January '48 to Prague, and still, as far as I could see, there wasn't anybody expecting any difficulties of the USSR.

Q: What was your job?

ARMSTRONG: My job was again third secretary-vice consul, and I was put into the political section initially. Then I was moved, no I was put in the economics section initially. Then I was moved to political, and then the consular. You were supposed to get a variety of experiences. And in the political section it involved having somebody be my translator, who would translate the press for me because I didn't know any Czech. I knew a little German, and my mother who was with me knew some German, so we got along with that as best we could. But literally we had no way of expecting what happened. Steinhardt was playing bridge nightly with members of the National Socialist party, who were the conservative party in Prague. And the only person I think in the embassy who had any contact with, I'll say the labor union, was our labor attaché. And would have been the only one who sensed that something was going to happen.

And when it did take place, it was done so skillfully, so smoothly, without very much eruption of any kind. There was a little shooting around the castle area when there was a student protest. There were armed bands of workers - they had colored or black bands on their arm, they weren't themselves armed – but were marching down the center of town. The Czechs themselves weren't prepared for anything like this. They thought this was a passing phenomenon. They said, "our people are not thugs. Our people are not vandals. This will all shake out." And of course what happened was, because it was done so smoothly and gradually, a lot of Czechs were taken in and instead of making the obvious move, which was to get their money outside, sell off their country places as fast as they could, move anything else outside – and they could still have done that for the first several months – get their exit visas and so forth, they didn't do it. And they stayed on, like my immediate neighbor, who was a splendid man, a fine lawyer. His family stayed on, and he was sent to a labor camp. She was obliged to share their apartment with another family and do housework and so forth. It was a very bitter period.

Q: Can we talk a bit about what life, what you were doing, how you operated before this coup in '48? I mean, when you arrived there, early '48 –

ARMSTRONG: January 10.

Q: --was the Soviet Union considered a menace or a problem? What was your impression of them?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I don't think any of us felt nervous about our own immediate situation until the Berlin Airlift. Then we could see the possibility of that blowing up, and then we'd be out of there. But as far as the Czech coup is concerned, it was fairly deplorable. We hated every minute of it. We did our best to keep out of trouble. It was

very easy for us to blunder in that way. We could embarrass ourselves; we could also embarrass our Czech friends. One had, even as arrived as late in the game as I, you'd have met some Czechs, who spoke English, and who circulated in the social life of the town with the social and diplomatic community. Then you found yourself in the position of wanting to do favors for them and be helpful.

And we'd be repeatedly warned by Steinhardt that we were not to do things like take valuables out of the country or take possessions out of the country or take people out of the country. And we knew all the time that he was doing that very thing. In fact, Mrs. Steinhardt was in it with him up to the elbows. And if you went to a dinner at the ambassador's residence and the ladies left and went into the petit salon with Mrs. Steinhardt, I was never sorry because she knew as much as he did about what was going on.

At any rate, one found oneself in the situation of trying to be helpful, trying to keep out of trouble and in the end, I was declared persona non grata and apparently it was because Walter Berge, who was senior to me in the political section, wanted to pass on some contacts to me when he left. One or two of them were very fine young Czechs who had served in the air force out of England during the war, and they had formed their own little resistance movement. I had no idea how it operated, and I did not really want to. But they wanted to be in touch with me, and under those circumstances I thought it was their responsibility if things went wrong. May I pour you coffee or tea?

Q: A little tea would be fine.

ARMSTRONG: What do you like in your tea?

Q: Straight.

ARMSTRONG: So I did meet with some of these people, but not often. And now and then I would meet with somebody, for a walk and he would ask me if I would take a letter for them. And once he asked me if I would take a suitcase out, and it wasn't for him, [it was for] somebody he knew he felt indebted to. And apart from that, I knew a couple very well –

Q: Would you take suitcases and letters?

ARMSTRONG: Yes. Always a little concerned, of course, with crossing the border. Because we would be stopped. The diplomatic passport was usually satisfactory, but you could never be positive that they wouldn't want to search you. But I and most of the Americans, the ones who didn't I hadn't very much respect for, cause I figured they weren't doing it out of conviction, they were just doing it because they were nervous Nellie's. Because if you could help somebody you helped somebody. I did wind up in the Czech archives, and I was declared persona non grata. And I'm not quite sure how this came about.

But fortunately I was already out. I had my travel orders to go to Palermo. Most of our third secretaries went to Italian posts. And I watched the good ones being picked off and my tour was Palermo.

Q: Yes, my Claiborne pal went to Genoa.

ARMSTRONG: That's right. I think the same personnel bureau was handling both countries. At any rate, I stopped in Florence to see if I could get some petrol coupons. Petrol was still scarce. He greeted me with the Herald Tribune with my picture on the front page. That was the reason the professor from Boston got in touch with me, because he found me. He said that by and large there was nothing in there that suggested that I was anywhere as guilty as I had been made out to be.

Q: What were they claiming?

ARMSTRONG: They were claiming that I had been working with the Czech Underground and named Czechs who were later imprisoned and executed in some cases. In other words, I should have blood on my hands, but in fact I'm exonerated by what's in the archives.

Q: I'd like to go back to Czechoslovakia. Once the coup had taken place and the Communist regime had taken over, did you find you were in really hostile territory at that point?

ARMSTRONG: Very much so. My mother would be followed every step of the way when she left the apartment. We had an apartment downtown. She and friend of hers who drove, they would often go out together, just to a market let's say, and they would walk and look at antique shops and things like that. They were always followed. It gave them a great charge. They would turn around and wink at the guys and so forth. In my case, I was never conscious of being followed. I would take the car to drive to the embassy, and I would have it there all day. I would go out in the evening, and I wasn't conscious of being followed then. But evidently I was more observed than I realized.

Q: Did you find your work, as a political officer, terribly curtailed at that point?

ARMSTRONG: Our political reporting, of course, was based on the local press and whatever gossip we could glean. I wasn't privy to as much high level gossip as other people would have been, for example people who were talking to the Czech foreign minister and so forth. I did meet Masaryk briefly right after I arrived, and I was of course among those who stood on the street corner and wept when his bier went by. It was a real shock.

Q: He was apparently killed, pushed out a window.

ARMSTRONG: No question in the Czechs' mind that it was a murder-assassination. Defenestration. This professor from Boston has looked in the archives with respect to Masaryk of course and he tells a story about three men who would have been eyewitnesses to what happened. That one of them is dead and one of them, two of them are dead and one of them is living in a situation where he's had a stroke and he can't talk. At any rate, what he could glean was that they had forced their way into his apartment in the foreign office after he'd gone to bed. He had tried to escape by going into the bathroom and climbing out on a fairly substantial ledge outside the bathroom. If he was pushed, he may well have been pushed. If he wasn't, he obviously fell.

What was unpleasant was, for example, a senior member of the foreign ministry, that is senior to me, who was in charge of the American desk approached me and asked me if I would keep his family silver in my apartment. Of course I said I would and I kept it under my bed. I didn't think anybody was going to break in and look. He was just afraid that they were going to come and collect things like that from his house. And I don't know what happened to him. I have never known. But he did reclaim it before I left.

Q: Was there any discussion among the Americans there, here you'd been living in Czechoslovakia, and all of a sudden a new regime comes in and it turned out to be, the regime itself turned out to be one of the nastiest in the whole bloc-

ARMSTRONG: Yes.

Q: Why [were] the Czechs so nasty?

ARMSTRONG: Good question. I've never really put that to myself as to why it took them, why they were so hardnosed with their form of communism for so long. All I can tell you is the communist penetration of Czechoslovakia was done in a very gradual and disarming fashion. And then after that, things tightened up and people were thrown in prison or sent to labor camps. They totally wiped out the professional class and the middle class. They didn't need any lawyers any more. The doctors who practiced in hospitals were, by that time, working under conditions which were dominated by whoever was the Czech communist in charge. All the government offices were taken over with a communist at the head of it. Everybody had to watch his step. Everybody had to swear allegiance to a communist [unknown word]. Children were supposedly brainwashed in schools. Their parents would worry about this, wonder about sort of children they were bringing up since they were being so heavily indoctrinated. I asked my Czech professor friend about this because he would have been of the age, he was of the age of these children and he said not to worry, it didn't take.

Q: It didn't seem to take anywhere. When you left you were assigned to Palermo and you went there in what, was it '49 by that time?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, it was October '49.

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

ARMSTRONG: Until the beginning of June ’50.

Q: What was your job in Palermo?

ARMSTRONG: I was a vice consul handling visas. They had a big office handling citizenship because of the fact that there had been this holy year during which Americans had come over in great droves, had been persuaded by their cousins or sisters and their aunts to vote against the communists in the elections.

Q: Oh, yes the elections of ’48.

ARMSTRONG: We were pushing that in every way we could to prevent the communists from winning.

Q: Lots of money went in.

ARMSTRONG: A friend of mine was busy handing it out, a fellow named Mark [unknown name] who was with the CIA. But these American innocents would come over and they would try to vote, and then they would lose their citizenship by those rules. The same rules don’t apply anymore. So the citizenship office was very busy, and of course everybody wanted to get out of Palermo. It was still impoverished from the war. The opportunities were nil. Those who did get out were usually the ones who went to Milan, where there was more opportunities just generally. But the others would want to get out because they had a distant relative in the United States, and they thought this was the answer. [There were] a lot of pitiful cases. So what could you do? You got trained to say no.

Q: You were just saying no, no, no.

ARMSTRONG: That’s right. As nicely as you could.

Q: Was there concern about the mafia in the United States and its ties to Sicily at that time?

ARMSTRONG: I understand that Lucky Luciano was in Palermo while I was there. I was told he showed up at bars, particular bars. Only later, from looking at television, did I learn how the mafia had gotten their grip on things in Palermo. It was thanks to the American army, which had come in and figured out the best way to accomplish its own purposes was to establish these characters in key situations, and they took over. But what we had in my day was not a mafia situation, but a kind of crazy Robin Hood situation. There was a man who was said to have robbed the rich to feed the poor. I’m groping for his name right now. Kidnapping was a favorite activity. It still is in Chechnya I get.

Q: Oh, yes, well, in Colombia, too.

ARMSTRONG: So that was going on, and if you took a drive upcountry, let's say, not very far out of town, you would get into an area where people lived - and this is so European, so different from the United States - if you worked a farm in the United States, you lived on the farm. If you worked on a farm in Europe, you lived in the village and went off to the fields every day and came back at the end of the day. So you'd see these peasants going along with their donkey carts, going to or from the fields, and they always had a gun across their laps. They had a dog in the back and a gun across the knees. They were afraid of the very kind of marauding that was going on by this Robin Hood type. Wasn't the mafia that they were worried about.

Q: Were you getting pressure from New York congressmen and all to issue visas?

ARMSTRONG: On visa cases, yes. I'd get a call in the middle of the night, and I'd think, "Oh, my God, what's happened to my brother or my sister?" And it'd be some congressman. And one in particular, I think Rooney, maybe one of the more objectionable –

Q: John Rooney of Brooklyn.

ARMSTRONG: He wasn't of Italian background, but I guess he had a lot of Italians in his voting district.

Q: He was a very powerful figure for state department appropriations.

ARMSTRONG: Very much so. At the end, I was due a home leave at the end of six or seven months, and I was determined not to come back. It was a very disagreeable climate in the consulate itself. We had a consul general who very few people could get along with except the one woman consul who was his spy. And the consul general's wife was very autocratic. And because her mother was very big in California politics, she and both her mother, who was there much of the time, they would throw their weight around. They treated the staff as if they were peons. It was really quite a shock. We didn't expect to find that in the foreign service. But the story was, I'm told, that he was an old China hand, and some of them I think were accustomed to situations where they were all powerful. And he wasn't as bad as his wife; she was very difficult.

Q: Who was it?

ARMSTRONG: His name was David Berger. And he retired after that post. And I liked to think I helped it along. At any rate, the one thing she, the wife was very, well this is just gossip –

Q: Well, it gives a flavor for the period.

ARMSTRONG: She seemed to be resentful of the fact that somebody had served at an embassy. And there were two of us who'd come from embassies, one from Hungary and then the other, I, and my mother. And I think she was particularly unpleasant with respect to us. And when you get to a post, of course, you have a month or six weeks, I don't know how much it is today, where you can live in a hotel, until you've found something suitable. But your expenses are covered for you. And so we decided we'd live in a hotel that was probably the nicest one there and had a lovely view of the bay. Although we couldn't afford the food prices there, so we managed cooking some meals in our hotel room on a little electric hot plate. But Mrs. Berger couldn't stand this, and neither could her husband. They tried to get me out of there so fast. And they offered me all kinds of opportunities, and they were crummy. You lived in neighborhoods where everybody hung their clothes out on the line. And I said to my mother that I didn't join the foreign service to live in a slum. And eventually a situation opened up [in] a part of a compound that had a major house, that belonged to a principessa, which we rented as a government and where the consul general lived. There were a number of ancillary buildings and in one case it was a stable, and that had been renovated and made more or less habitable. So my mother and I moved into this stable. And it looked quite charming except that in the winter, there wasn't the kind of, the building was built in such a way that it would be cool in summer. So in winter it would be just damp and you could write your name on the walls of your bedroom in the mold. But we were surrounded by lemon groves; that part of it was pleasant.

But Palermo was a place where all you could do, your work was dull, but you could get in the car on the weekend with your bread and your cheese and wine and see beautiful things and interesting places. A lot of old Greek ruins are there, which you probably know and some which are not on the tourist beat. There are small minor amphitheaters, which most people don't even know about, which we'd be shown by our Sicilian friends. That was the way we made it habitable for us, so to speak, or passed the time. Plus in the winter there was the opera season.

Q: When you went back on home leave, what did you do - head right for personnel?

ARMSTRONG: That's right. I had some one who frowned on me for making a complaint. And eventually I was offered a post at Basel, which would have been interesting, just to relieve the man who was due home leave and his replacement I don't think was in mind, they just needed a temporary person there. And I was all set to go to Basel when the guy decided he wouldn't take home leave. And eventually I was offered Montreal and I took it happily.

Q: So you went to Montreal in 19 -

ARMSTRONG: --50.

Q: 50. I was thinking this might be a good time to stop – I put at the end of the tape where we are, and I'll pick it up when you went to Montreal 1950 and you were in

Montreal from when to when.

ARMSTRONG: Two and a half years and then went direct transfer to Ottawa.

Q: Alright, why don't we pick it up at that point.

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Today is March 6, 2000. Louise you said you wanted to talk a little more about India, your time there. And if you have anything you'd like to add or expand on, please go ahead.

ARMSTRONG: I was having a look at the map to remind myself of what was the Madras responsibility. And you go up here to Andhra Pradesh, which includes Hyderabad, and there is Madras and here is a large piece of Mysore and Kerala down there and Travancore and Cochin comprises Kerala all the way down there. So it is quite an expanse. So when you asked me what I did officially, it sounded kind of thin. I said, I mentioned I did a lot of consular work and a lot of invoices and so forth. I also did the coding and decoding. For the most part we used the old Brown code because we didn't have a great deal that required much secrecy. But when we used the coding machine, I tell you, you lost every fingernail you owned, it was a real devil. At any rate, apart from such functions, I was in a sense the American presence in south India. I had a wonderful consul but he wasn't well and didn't particularly like traveling. He maintained his office work with great diligence and skill. And he maintained his alliances and friendships with all the right people in Madras and among the missionaries, but there were no official excursions unless I did them. And I was only too happy to. So as I say, I was the American presence if you want to call it that. But mostly I was just a girl looking for adventure and curious, a lot of curiosity. It led to some very interesting experiences. Also among my duties was to dispose of the classified material periodically by taking it up to the rooftop of the building and burning it in a kind of a trash can in the middle of the tropical heat. Much of the clerical work was done by our clerical staff. We had a splendid Indian Christian who was number one clerk. He was accustomed to going down to the port and clearing shipments and things of that nature and was kind of chief boss of the rest of the clerical staff. It was my consul's judgment that we should not hire a Brahmin because the entire British community were depending upon Brahmins for their clerical and intellectual skills. But it was as if you were caught in the toils of a community. Whatever official personal secrets you might have went straight through the community. So he made a very distinct point of no Brahmins. So we had a mixed group of Hindus and Indian Christians. So then he scored a point, which he was determined on doing, he managed to hire a female clerk. It was a great innovation. She was a very nice personable, diligent young woman.

One of the things about south India was that there were three languages – Tamil, Feligu and Malayalam. And I once had aspirations to study at least one. I tried, and it didn't seem to me that I was going to get very far. It was so unrelated to any European language that it just came out sounding [like nonsense]. But the young Indian Civil Service

officers, British who managed to learn Tamil would get a stipend for their efforts. Among other things, sort of showing the flag, I would visit and speak at Indian colleges [and] hospitals. We had a very major hospital, which was a missionary hospital in Valore. And I guess I saw my first cadavers there. Thanks to missionaries and Indian friends I probably saw about as much of India as you possibly could see. I had a young friend, an Indian friend, who was a journalist and was working for the English-language newspaper, the Madras Mail, and he had a certain amount of native pride in showing me about because he wanted me to see part of India and meet those people. So through him I was able to make quite a few interesting contacts and always found these senior Indian gurus, politicians or whatever they were very approachable. As I said to you I never felt physically uncomfortable in south India. Now there were times you'd be in a real jam. In one instance I was driving some distance from Madras in the Cochin area and the most dreaded thing that can happen to you happened. You pick up a bullock shoe. A bullock shoe is a thin round band of steel, like a woman's bracelet almost, razor sharp and bullocks were always dropping these shoes. And an automobile tire would be ripped apart. And tires weren't all that available; it was wartime. Neither was gasoline. You always traveled with a couple of tins of petrol. But in this instance we were in a very thinly populated, if you would believe there was any thinly populated area, but we were in between villages and sure enough we had a flat tire. We had one spare, and we couldn't afford to take a chance on another bullock shoe. So when we got into the nearest village, we found what they called a petrol station, but they had no tires to sell. They could order one but it would take a day or two. And the next question was where to stay. And there seemed to be no hotel or such. It so happened that somebody directed me to the local priest. And he was a bushy bearded Indian chap who was in his 70s or 80s I guess, very welcoming. And lo and behold he offered us, me and the driver, a place to stay for the night. So if there was ever a Christian it was he. Otherwise I was hopelessly stranded and would have had to sleep in the car.

One of the things I observed in India was that there was no tradition of philanthropy there. I found only one instance of it, a so-called Ramakrishna mission. And I met a charming young Hindu who was serving in this mission. Its real function, essential function, was to provide orphanages for young boys. And I was really impressed with him as a person, if you want to say a man had a Christ-like demeanor, he did. But honestly apart from that and what the American missionaries were doing and the YMCA and the YWCA, there was no organized philanthropy of any kind.

Q: Alms.

ARMSTRONG: Alms, but no consistent giving. And there would be holy men who lived totally off alms. And they'd wander around from household to household, in the woods eating nuts and berries and then going into a community. [They'd] become what you might call the local holy man to a particular family. One of these was an enchanting man that I met. He maintained or at least the family that offered him hospitality- [end of tape]

This holy man, a man who must've been in his 50s, wore the saffron robe and as far as I

could see he had no visible means of support except for what was offered him, he was made particularly welcome in this home of what I would say would be affluent, middle-class Indians. And they looked upon his presence there as a blessing upon the household and also they turned to him for advice. And whether his advice was worth anything I've no idea. But he always had a radiant smile about him that gave you, and I'm sure them, a sense of peace. And broadly speaking a sense of happiness and well-being. I was told about him. He didn't speak English so I had to use my friend as translator, interpreter, that he did amazing things such as burying himself underground for weeks at a time or sinking underneath water for days and surviving, all of which sounds terribly unbelievable but it was certainly taken as faith by those who were acquainted with him.

This leads me to the fact that I visited three ashrams while I was in south India. The most significant one was named for Sri Oribindo who had written in English and published his philosophical works widely. And they happened to have been read by Margaret Wilson, the president's daughter when she was at University of Chicago, and she was sufficiently impressed that she wanted to visit and spend some time in his ashram. She did so and was overtaken by some kind of an illness, and she's buried in Pondicherry, where the ashram is located, in the cemetery there. Pondicherry in those days was still a French possession, a little enclave along the sea, out of Madras. I mean cut out of Madras presidency itself, quite a charming small city.

The ashram was the main industry there. Interestingly enough it reminded me of a retirement community. Because people who had wanted to come and study the teachings of Sri Oribindo would frequently come with their families. They would give up whatever means they had, whatever estate they had, turn it over to the community and participate in the community's activities, which were all in support of the community itself. For example each individual had his own tasks and responsibilities. They did their own cooking, baking, washing up, cleaning and there must have been other tasks that they had to do. They had a shoe cobbler establishment and I think a spinning establishment. Everybody was happily busy and at the same time had time for prayers and study. Then there would be a kind of an evensong.

By the time I visited Pondicherry and the Sri Oribindo ashram, he had died. But a Frenchwoman who had been his disciple became the leader and I've been groping in my memory for her title, but it won't come. And she was no young woman herself. But I understood that she still conducted some discussions and classes. But the principal thing she did was to give holy sight of herself every early evening. She would come out in sort of a gauzy white, and she would stand framed by a full moon behind and she would extend her arms out to the community who would all be gathered in the gardens nearby, and be in this position of namaskaram, appreciating holy sight of her.

This was perhaps the most westernized of the communities because English was reasonably widely spoken. People came there from Calcutta and all over India. It wasn't local in the sense that some of the other ashrams I visited were. And the fact that they were willing to give up everything they owned and stay there, I thought was quite

remarkable. The guesthouse, which is interesting I think, was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was a very simple structure made of native wood, and it was open air as much as possible, but you could shutter yourself for your own privacy and your own room. The bed was simply a cot with a rope mattress, a rope whatever you call it – box spring – and it had a mattress on top. [It was] the minimum, but very satisfactory.

And I visited two other ashrams in turn. One had a particularly famous teacher guru. I would of course have no idea what he had to say because it was always in his own language. But the young men who would be grouped around him at the appointed time, let's say he would begin the session at ten o'clock in the morning, the young men grouped around him were greatly in awe of his presence. He would discourse for a while- [end of tape]

Q: They were gathered around him.

ARMSTRONG: They were in awe of the master. And they would listen to his discourse and he would stop and ask if there were any questions. And one point one of the - this all had to be translated for me by my friend who took me there – one of the questions was did the guru not feel that he was being, what would the word be, at any rate, didn't he disapprove of the fact that here was this young white woman who was not sitting with her knees curled up in front of her in the traditional Indian fashion and wasn't this a slight of his dignity? And he cheerfully responded that she wasn't used to sitting that way and in this instance it was perfectly alright.

The other ashram - which again was quite different each of these different from the other - was a very high caste Brahmin ashram. And I'm astonished to this day as to how I even got in there. But I was taken in there by a friend. And they had, I don't remember that I spent the night there, but they had modest accommodations for outsiders. But of course in the sense of being high caste Brahmins, all the food was prepared, which was like kosher cooking of the orthodox type, prepared by Brahmin people in the kitchen and then served to the Brahmin elite who would sit around cross-legged in this dining pavilion (you might call it a refectory but it was open air) and the food served on a palm leaf, all vegetarian and rice. I have to tell you it was the most exquisite food I had ever had in all of India. [It was] cooked with coconut oil, which is much lighter when you eat it, probably worse for you. But I never had better food. If I could go back there for more I would.

Another Indian experience was to go into the Mysore jungle. I became acquainted with a young man whose home was Mysore, and he and his brother invited me to go on a visit to the jungle, a safari. And I thought this would be a nice opportunity to invite one of the nice American woman missionaries I knew, unmarried. We all went off together in our several cars and arrived at a forest bungalow as they called it in the jungle, which meant it was a place the forest officer would stay as he was making his rounds. And this was a perfectly adequate place right in the heart of the jungle. I took my own cook with me, which was suggested. The two young men, the Mysore fellows, had their own cook too. Their brother, incidentally, was a general in the Indian army, when I say Indian I don't

mean Indian National Army but the British Indian Army. It was quite a distinguished Mysore family.

Well the safari would begin each day, and this was probably for about three days, four at the most, by getting up at five o'clock in the morning and setting off, usually by elephant. And I found riding an elephant it's like being on board ship, you're always bracing yourself. And you weren't always very happy with the thought that the elephant would stop and eat whenever it felt like it. Then it would run and catch up with the rest of the elephants. But it was an experience. At any rate, we would just be in the forest about five o'clock to hear the forest come alive. You could hear the birds and the other animal sounds and stay with roaming through the forest for about two hours at which point it would be getting too hot. You were always on the alert for tigers. There were tigers there. And so after ten o'clock, we would go back to the bungalow and we'd have a fairly substantial meal, Indian meal. Chapatis and all the rest and have a siesta. And then the end of the afternoon after the sun had gone down, we'd go out again, but this time in a jeep, which the boys had. And we'd drive the track through the jungle, which the forest officer used. And it was astonishing how many animal eyes you could see as you looked around, picked up by the lights of the jeep. And of course they would be attracted by the lights of the jeep. We never actually encountered a tiger, I'm happy to say. But every now and then they'd be indications that he'd been there. But one of my happiest memories is that visit to the Mysore jungle. And I always say to myself if I ever went back to India, it would be in winter and I'd do a safari. South India, I wouldn't know about the North.

[I have] two more small anecdotes or points. After I visited this third ashram, which was so high caste Hindu, I was taken by an Indian friend to visit a community which really consisted of one or two families, extended families. And there were known as Nambudri Brahmins. And the curious thing about them was their women observed purdah. Now how that cross-fertilization came about, between the Hindus and the Muslims, I don't know. But it must have had something to do with the Muslim invasion of North India. Because when I arrived at this village and I was met by my friend's friend and another man or two, and I sat and visited with them - just a pleasant social visit - there was a little girl of about ten who was hanging on to one of the men, a daughter I think. And she couldn't stop staring at me. And I realized later that she wasn't used to seeing a woman of any kind out and about with any of the male members of her family.

The women themselves lived in their own quarters from the great-grandmother on down. The matriarch was sufficiently elderly. I wouldn't begin to guess her age, but she was a magnificent personality who received me in a loincloth. And where she would normally have had earrings, the tendency is to each time put a larger round circular ring in the ear so that it stretches the earlobe, and her earlobes were simply empty loops. You visit this gray-haired lady with empty loops in her ears and her loincloth and you really are impressed. She then introduced me to other members of the female household. They lived in a house that was so constructed of stone that it was very cool, the coolest place I'd been in on the whole trip. And she couldn't have been warmer. She was, her interpreter was a grandson who was one of the men I'd been visiting outside, and I was introduced to

some of the other wives, daughters, whatever they were, who were mature. And we talked about god knows what and she asked me if I had any children. And I said no, I wasn't married. And at the end of our conversation as I was leaving, she said I must come back and bring my children with me.

I had always heard about Kerala, Cochin in particular, that it was the one part of South India where women were often bare-breasted. And sure enough as I was driving through the countryside, it was more likely the peasant women that I would meet than a more elevated social status. These were not Nambudri Brahmin, these were just ordinary lower caste women I suppose. But part of this business about being naked above the waist apparently has its origins in the fact that it's a matriarchal society there, which means the land is all in the maternal side. And oddly enough, whether it's because of that maternal, matriarchal establishment or not I don't know, but that part of South India provided some of the best brains in the Indian Civil Service up north. They didn't need to stay home and watch the paddy fields, as their wives were able to stay home and go about such responsibilities, the responsibilities of the estate. So they could do something else and there was nothing else very challenging. Some of the best know upper bureaucratic names are people who came from families there.

One other thing that occurred to me was the fact that you had these two hill stations in south India. One, Budukaman, was the British hill station, it was official. The other was the American missionary hill station, Kodicanal. I think I mentioned that earlier. I remember that when I was in Madras there was still discussion of the episode in which the Japanese navy, which was sailing in the Bay of Bengal and had stopped at Colombo, had then cruised up along the coast as far as Madras, fired a few salvos at the city of Madras and then went back its way it had come. Nobody knows to this day what was in the Japanese's mind. I did see a television program relating to this not long ago, but they miscalculated severely because if they had landed, there would have been no defenses. This was about 1942 I think.

Q: Early 1942. The Japanese navy came, they went all the way over to Madagascar, and they cruised there. But there was no follow through plan.

ARMSTRONG: No follow-through. They could have had India, at least the south of it. And with the government up six, seven thousand feet up in the hill station and no military establishment of any consequence, it was wide open.

I go back to Prague now, and I don't remember what I said before. But I can tell you the only time I was ever frightened was soon after I arrived with my mother. I didn't know a word of Czech. This was in the days before they would prepare you for a foreign post with language studies. This was January '48. And I arrived on Woodrow Wilson Avenue, at Woodrow Wilson station. And if there hadn't been somebody from the admin section of the embassy to meet me, I would have had to stumble along on my own, with getting my own cabs. But fortunately he was there. And we stayed at a hotel initially, my mother and I, and one night, there being a movie theater not far away, we thought we'd go to see

what was showing. It turned out to be a very ugly anti-American piece of communist propaganda produced in Poland. And the Americans were depicted so viciously, as being so villainous and so debauched, that the two of us in a full theater were sitting, cringing, slumped down in our seats, hoping nobody would notice. [We were] thinking to ourselves if there should suddenly be a fire alarm or something dramatic and everybody would be rushing out, we wouldn't dare open our mouths to declare who we were.

I may be repeating myself, but the main thing was to find a place to live. This is always true when you're starting a foreign service post. There aren't government quarters. We first had the Alcron Hotel, then we moved in with three American girls from the embassy. And then we tried to buy a house in the suburbs and found it was just impossible. It didn't work; my mother was too isolated. It was hard to heat. And the only thing remarkable about the house, it looked attractive, was that they had stored, people who were renting the house had stored three great canisters of goose fat. Goose fat was their treasure. Why they left it behind I'll never know, but they couldn't take it with them. After a week of this, we decided no go and we were lucky enough to stumble on the apartment, which we eventually used, which I think I talked about earlier.

And then there was the issue of socializing. Initially, we having arrived just before the coup, there was a social community of Czechs and westerners, that you could easily move into. It was very agreeable. But gradually one became more concerned about mingling with Czechs. There was one young woman who approached me cheerfully because she had known GIs [American soldiers]. Her English was very fluent but also very GI English. And she was easy, outgoing and bright. She was a Jewish woman named Eva Donodova. And Eva had a circle of friends my age so that every now and then I joined up with them for a pleasant evening. But Eva had been imprisoned by the Nazis because she was Jewish. And she thought it was time she got out of Czechoslovakia because she didn't know how things would go under the communist regime for her. She borrowed a little money from me; it didn't amount to much, it was really a gift. And she got caught going over the border, she and her companions because it was at the time you couldn't exit Czechoslovakia anymore. So she disappeared off the radar screen for a while, then lo and behold she was back in Prague. And she got in touch with me, and she said to me quite open and honestly, "They let me back because I knew you and they want me to report on you." So you know she was pleasant to be with and fun and there was no reason to cut her off. She was honest with me, and I knew where I stood. But that was one of the curiosities of living there at the time.

I guess I also mentioned the fact that my translator-interpreter later explained to the embassy that he was obliged to report on me. Something, on a weekly basis. And if he didn't know anything, he made it up.

I think I mentioned last time that things got more and more uncomfortable when we realized that the concierge of the apartment building that I lived in was an informer. And she was a very unpleasant, made life unpleasant for me and anybody that I employed, but there was nothing I could do about it. At the same time that we were going through this

period of social isolation, the embassies, the foreign embassies drummed up their own sociability. They, among other things, the Americans had an opportunity which was unique, through the foreign office we were able to use a villa of some two hours drive outside of Prague, set in the hills, which would accommodate skiing and other outdoor activity. And that was a great salvation particularly, I think, for the clerks. But we all enjoyed it. Eventually after I left I understand that the government took this back again. They had already appropriated the property from the owner who was a shoe manufacturer. But then they decided I guess that the Americans didn't deserve this anymore, so they took it back.

But on one occasion while we were visiting there, usually it would be on a weekend, I found three little boys huddled in a rabbit hutch. A rabbit hutch looks rather like you see in kennels for cats. And they had a kind of a tiered, tiers and mesh wire in the front. And these children had heard that the police were looking for them and here they were hiding in a rabbit hutch, which tells you what life was like in the country at that time.

I'm not sure if I mentioned going to Krakow. I had an opportunity in, perhaps it was May of 1948, to fly in the air attaché's plane to Krakow, no to Warsaw. I was fortunate enough to stay with friends in Warsaw. One of the women in the embassy who was of Polish extraction, American, suggested to me that we could make a trip to Krakow by bus, by plane and bus. She would enjoy it, and I said I was delighted with the thought. So we flew to Krakow and landed in a pasture. I'm pretty sure I talked about this before. The pasture was the airport. As we were about to leave, the police detained us. She had taken a photograph as we came into landing. And we were obliged to go to the police station and just sit there and study our shoes. We didn't know what was going to happen. They took her film away from her, which of course was a big disappointment. She explained that we had diplomatic privileges and so forth and they should call the embassy. They took their own sweet time. Eventually we were released and allowed to go our own way. So we did our Krakow sightseeing, but we didn't have as much time left as we wanted. Then we got on a bus to Auschwitz, and that's one reason I've never felt it necessary to go to the Holocaust Museum here. They had so recently opened Auschwitz as a museum that if you walked past bin after bin, first there would be a bin of what you would call crutches and other things of that sort, artificial limbs. Then there was a bin of teeth that had been taken from people with gold and melted down. Then you came to a bin of shoes. And the human oil in the shoes was such that the flies were buzzing on it. As I say I don't think I need to go to the Holocaust Museum. But enough of that.

Q: Well, then you went to Montreal and you were in Montreal from 1950 until when?

ARMSTRONG: '53.

Q: What were you doing in Montreal?

ARMSTRONG: I was vice consul and economic commercial officer. And mainly they needed someone in that slot who would respond to the many required reports expected

from the department of agriculture, the department of commerce, mines and mineralogy – what do we call that department if it is a department?

Q: Department of the interior.

ARMSTRONG: Department of the interior. And so I became acquainted with people in the pulp and paper industry. For example, the headquarters of the association is in Montreal. And I became friendly with people in the mining industry, a number of whom were Americans, and would invite me up to visit their mines and their exploration camps. And then the textile industry, I think, had its headquarters in Montreal and that was another one that there was required reporting on. And one time I had an assignment of investigating the market for small appliances in Montreal. It doesn't sound like very much but by the time it was done my boss said to me, "I didn't think a woman could do something like that," which I thought was ridiculous because women are more after small appliances than men are as a rule. I mean irons, toasters, things like that, what was the market, what was the potential market for American exports? I found out what they were selling now, what they thought they'd be interested in selling.

Q: Who was the consul general?

ARMSTRONG: A good question. I'll have to fill that one in later.

Q: You can fill that one in later, no problem.

ARMSTRONG: I've reached the stage where names don't spring to mind. We enjoyed Montreal. As I mentioned I think, it was a segmented society, a divided society. We meet almost nobody what they would call the French community. And the upper class French community tended to keep to themselves anyway. Fortunately the English community, the Anglo community, was very well-established and very open and easy. There was a garden club in which my mother had participated and made many delightful friends, English friends, a lot of Anglo friends there, whom I came to know as well. McGill University had a substantial number of American medical professors in those days. They had begun to be imported, oh, some 10 years at least earlier. Most of the women I met would have been older than I, so their husbands had been there some time teaching. And they couldn't have been nicer. So we made some very pleasant friendships there, some of which translated into meeting people in Ottawa whom they knew.

Eventually I was transferred to Ottawa, and I arrived on Coronation Day [for] Queen Elizabeth II. You never saw a city looking more splendid, banners everywhere, magnificent. It gave one a great lift. I was there on my own. My mother had gone down to the States. I was going to have to find suitable housing and so forth. But there was just a thrill to walk down this main thoroughfare, near the Parliament buildings and see all the bunting, all the banners, parades. You can imagine what it was like. Again the job was economic commercial and again some of it overlapped with what I'd been doing in Montreal. We were able to make friends readily because my mother joined a book club

where we met some very interesting people. There was the younger set, not so young some of them, the governor general was crazy about barn dancing, so he set quite a pattern for society with that. He loved skiing and barn dancing and his name will come to me in due course. One could also go skiing very readily, half hour to the ski slopes, which is about half what it took to go to the ski slopes from Montreal. Wonderful lake country for swimming and canoeing. In fact, endless opportunities to go on canoeing weekends in relatively unpopulated areas, as long as you were with somebody who knew, who had his bearings and knew where we were going. You could go off and camp, spend the night and then canoe some more.

Q: Did you run into something that I've heard people who served in Canada at other times say - one problem about the Canadians is, that when they hear you're American, particularly attached to the embassy or consulate, it's "big you" and "poor little us" and "you have to understand us" and that sort of thing, which meant you better keep your hand on your wallet as far as negotiating.

ARMSTRONG: Well there's a certain type of Canadian, yes, who's impossible. We used to go to an annual summer conference at which these Anglo-Canadian super-intellectuals would gather and it was always very "loftier than thou" when it came to anything American. We were the uncultured barbarians. We got awfully tired of that. The Globe and Mail was must reading, but it was so full of anti-Americanisms. It's par for the course. I don't think it will ever change.

Q: Did you get any feel within the French community about the role of the Roman Catholic Church at all?

ARMSTRONG: Well I was there at a time before the big change, which is probably why I met so few French Canadians, and those I met were lower class. They were still very much under the influence of the church and the old style. It's only in, well I can't say recent anymore because it's taken some time [for this] to happen, but you go to Montreal now and, by george, they're even beginning to feel so much at home that they don't mind speaking English. And they're on top of things. As we all know, they've got a lot going industry wise, high tech industry wise.

One of the things when we lived in Ottawa that we did was visit outside of Montreal and Quebec the asbestos mines, the asbestos industry. I think it was General Dynamics was trying to make a purchase there. Or else get rid of something they already held, I've forgotten. The curious thing was, the man who showed us around one of the most significant mines and mills of asbestos, came from a family that had worked in that area, with asbestos for three generations and never had any problems with the lungs. People living in the village somewhere else might, but he didn't. In the plant, in the mill, they all wore masks. The mining itself seemed to be open pit mining. But I remember New Jersey, Manville, New Jersey, they had terrific lawsuits. They weren't necessarily the result of people working in the plant, but people living nearby. So it's rather like tobacco I think. It could be that some people are more sensitive than others.

Q: How did you find the Canadian market? Were there various obstacles put on trying to sell American products in Canada?

ARMSTRONG: No, I never felt that way. Immediately after the free trade agreement was signed, which was of course bitterly fought by some vested interests in Canada, not by Canadians who were in senior official positions, who were all for it. But there were lots of smaller manufacturers of things like furniture and so forth who were suddenly making money hand over fist because they had the cheaper Canadian dollar and easy access to raw materials that were used and were doing a land office business here. So on the whole I think Canadians have no regrets though there was an initial bitter, bitter internal dispute.

Q: Well at the time though you were, this was '50 to '53 period –

ARMSTRONG: That was too early for [it.]

Q: Was it hard to market American goods then?

ARMSTRONG: I don't remember that there were any serious impediments. Very often people who were handling, let's say small appliances, had made long term commitments with their suppliers so they were in no hurry to change. But there was no, I never determined that there was any serious objection. If they could make a connection they would. One thing, which has nothing to do really with ordinary commerce, was that you couldn't buy any American wines and very little American booze in the provincially-controlled liquor stores. That's one thing they absolutely shut us out cold. The American wine industry kept working at this and working at this. I don't know how things are today, but very rarely did we see any decent American wines.

Q: I'm told that it was very hard to get American whiskey, I mean regular whiskey because Canadian whiskey -

ARMSTRONG: Well Canadian and British whiskey were better than ours.

Q: Well, it's a matter of taste.

ARMSTRONG: Well I know we don't have bourbon. But the Canadian rye is first class. Of course they could import British scotch quite readily and perhaps more readily, with the trade agreements they had with Britain, than we could. It was the wine that was the big hang-up.

Q: Did the embassy do much to try and open it up?

ARMSTRONG: Oh, yes, constantly. I think we've succeeded to a degree, although I just don't know because I haven't visited recently. There was at the time, when I was there with my husband, a group of commercial attachés who would meet once a month, each

one being the host. It would at a hotel or a dining room of some sort, a public dining room. And the entire menu would be representative of the host country. And the wines that went with it would be representative. When it came time for the Americans to do the entertaining, my husband looked around to see what officer he could spare to send down over the border to Ogdensburg and bring back American wine. He hit on this chap in the administrative office who really wouldn't have known one kind of wine from another. And he came back with Gallo red and Gallo white. Well we had to make the best of it. But afterwards the French commercial attaché came up to Bill and he said, "These wines, you've got us worried," being sincere.

Q: How about during this '50-'53 period, did you get involved in complaints that the Canadians had about cultural invasion – Maclean's Magazine and all that?

ARMSTRONG: Oh, yes, and afterwards when I was there later with my husband. It began to be a more and more burning issue for them. And some of the civil servants who ramrodded these restrictions through were among our best friends. But it was a point of survival for them, an issue of survival. And of course Readers Digest protested. Of course Time magazine protested. But honestly you can see why they needed to do something like this. Of course they can't control what comes in from Buffalo, over the radio and television. But their own domestic material is so high class, I'd much rather listen to some of those Canadian stations than our own.

Q: Well what about, was the St. Lawrence Waterway in the process or-

ARMSTRONG: That was coming about when I was with my husband in Ottawa, very much so.

Q: But that comes later on?

ARMSTRONG: That comes later, after I was married.

Q: Now when did you get married.

ARMSTRONG: May of '59.

Q: So we've still got quit a bit to cover before that.

ARMSTRONG: Well yes I guess we do. In the intervening period, I went back to Washington and I worked…Well first of all I was invited to work with Eleanor Dulles and I consulted with….No, before that my transfer read that I was supposed to go into the cultural affairs office, information and cultural affairs. I just didn't think this was the way to move up in the foreign service, so I consulted George Vest who'd been with me in Ottawa. So he said he'd look around and see what there was, apart from this. Then the next thing that happened was I was offered a position to work for Eleanor Dulles. And I asked George what he thought and he said, "I wouldn't do it."

Q: She had an operation dealing with Berlin, with Germany.

ARMSTRONG: That's right and where could you go from there? And I wasn't, I didn't have a German background. So I found a slot in INR [Intelligence and Research], and I was working there for a while when my application for advanced economic study was granted, and I went to Berkeley. So I spent the academic year, '56-57 at Berkeley. When I finished that – I'm sorry I'm getting ahead. Before that I went to a tariff conference in 1956 in Geneva. That was out of INR. They needed each particular- [end of tape]

So that was a very happy occasion in the end because who would object to being in Geneva for three months. The rate of exchange was tolerable, and the per diem was quite tolerable. And the weather initially was balmy and then it turned cold. But one could go skiing every weekend, only the man who was head of my team was biting his nails for fear that I and another officer who would go skiing would come back with a broken limb and that would put the kibosh on the broken limb to some extent. But that never happened.

And my particular group was negotiating with the Italians and the Austrians, and we had a representative of the department of commerce on our team and also the international tariff office guy. The representative from the tariff commission knew what he was doing; the rest of us were sort of learning on the job. Bless his heart when we discovered that the Austrians did not have any calculators, that they were doing all these figures in their head to see what would be the trade impact of lowering the tariffs on this or that item, he did it for them. And they were a very nice group of people that we worked with. They were relatively new because the government was just pulling itself together in those days. And the Italians were very affable so everything went quite well I think. Only we were looking forward to just another few days after Easter of enjoying life in Geneva when the word came back that the bureau of conference affairs had run out of money. Then we didn't have congressional opportunities to go and finish assignments. Then we were just living hand to mouth with what the bureau of international conferences could afford. So it was get out of there, ready or not! Fortunately my work was finished, but there were some people who were very embarrassed by this; they had to do things at the last minute that they had no intention of trying to do in a hurry.

Back home, I guess that's when I went to Berkeley, not immediately but some time soon after. Then I came back to trade agreements, and after a period in trade agreements, which was in the old munitions building, there was an opening which somebody mentioned to me, which was in the Bureau of United Kingdom and Canadian Affairs as economic officer. I jumped at that opportunity and spent most of my time actually on work dealing with Canada.

In the course of that I'd already met Willis Armstrong, but it so happened that since he was economic counselor in Ottawa and we had regular meetings of Americans and Canadians and some cabinet level commission, that he would have to call the desk and

the desk would be me. And I wouldn't be on the phone very long, but I would be setting things up with other people that needed to talk to him. When the telephone bills were totted up at the embassy in Ottawa, the woman working in the office responsible said, "An hour and a half, Mr. Armstrong to Louise Schaffner. It'd be cheaper if he'd marry the girl!" At that point we were already becoming serious I should think. But if we told anybody it would discredit us with respect to the arrangements we were making professionally at either end. So we had to keep very quiet about it.

Q: What would be the consequences, at that point, career-wise if you'd announced our engagement?

ARMSTRONG: Apart from the fact that it would be awkward in the sense of nobody being sure whether I was speaking for myself or for Willis and vice versa, apart from that, there was not yet a tradition of women staying on in the foreign service. It was just expected that you would retire, which I did.

Q: My understanding is that this was not a regulation or a rule.

ARMSTRONG: It was, well I've never been quite sure myself. It may have been a regulation, or just a convention which was never challenged. I know of only one other instance where the woman went on working after marrying, but her husband was by then retired. Well of course I can see the problem. It still s a problem, of having a couple who need assignments, what are you going to do? You can't have them working for each other. You can have them at the same post, but it's not easy. And placing them is always difficult, so there are problems for the department. But at the same time, I think the department must be confronted by a lot of problems because they can't keep the young men whose wives who have good jobs here.

Q: It causes great problems because there's also the feeling that you can't reserve certain posts for just married couples too. You have to be fair to those who aren't married within the foreign service.

ARMSTRONG: Exactly. So it means a large post, and it means often a choice post, which is being taken away from somebody else.

Q: When did you leave the service?

ARMSTRONG: Well I was married on May 2, '59 and by that time I had resigned. I don't know the exact date.

Q: You came back later.

ARMSTRONG: I came back much later.

Q: Let's cover the period after, while you were a foreign service wife. Did, you go up to

Canada?

ARMSTRONG: I had already served there of course. So I went back as married to Willis Armstrong, I had a lot of friends. And many of them he already knew because I had given him their names. And they all seemed to be not only very surprised, but very pleased and very welcoming. So it was, in that sense, a very happy way to start one's married life. Fortunately for me, my husband was the kind of person who liked to talk shop. He didn't reveal any secrets, but he enjoyed talking shop. Some men want to get rid of it as soon as they leave the office. And in that sense I felt I was still part of the game, so to speak.

Q: So who was your ambassador?

ARMSTRONG: It was Livvie Merchant and then Richard Wigglesworth. I'd briefed him for the post when he was being groomed. I briefed him in the sense of taking him around to see the contacts he needed to make before he went to Ottawa. He was a 30-year congressman from Boston, Massachusetts. Wigglesworth had his, he was a New Englander and his wife Florence was from Kentucky. She was a spirited, outgoing person whereas Richard, or Dick as he was known, was somewhat silent and seemingly retiring. But he didn't miss anything obviously. At any rate, what ticked me was as I took him around to meet the people he was supposed to meet, he was writing everything on the back of an envelope, literally. But a very nice likeable man. And she lent a great deal of sparkle to the situation. We all enjoyed her.

It so happened though that he thought he was indestructible. He came from Massachusetts, and when the cold weather set in, he went around – he was lucky if he wore galoshes, he rarely wore a topcoat. He used to worry us all. But in the end what did him in, and he died in office, was a blood clot, which seized him when he was on a trip I think, somewhere in French Canada or Montreal. It may have been Montreal. And of course [he] was hospitalized there. But he didn't survive. I guess he had a stroke. It was pretty much immediate and very shocking. So he was to be replaced by Livingston Merchant who was going to serve a second tour there. But in the meantime, Livvie Merchant was designated to be on the team that was to negotiate with the Indians and the Pakistanis on Kashmir, the eternal Kashmir dispute. So he was gone for some time on that project. In the meantime my husband had moved from, he succeeded Tyler Thompson as DCM, when Tyler was transferred to Finland. And therefore as DCM, he was chargé. And he was chargé for a very long time. So that was a very nice experience for him; he enjoyed every bit of it. He was hobnobbing with ambassadors who were treating him as an equal because after all the United States is important enough that even a charge is important.

Q: What was your impression of the ruling political and economic elite of Canada at this time? Because I'm sure you were meeting them at this time.

ARMSTRONG: Well the thing that struck me was that there was a very small group of elite, intellectually and commercially and socially, but they all knew each other even

though they spanned the whole horizontal side of Canada. That is, the people who were upper class in Vancouver and Victoria knew the people who were upper class in Montreal. They had grown up together, gone to the same schools together, gone to the same summer places. It was very unique I think in that sense. But everybody that one met in that group was really very approachable, easy, friendly. For example, if we would go on an official visit to St. John's, Newfoundland, the local governor I guess he was, living in Government House, was an elite member of that community. They would spend their winters in Bermuda or on the Mediterranean. Perfectly charming man. I met the woman who was the wife of the Governor of British Columbia; she was a Montreal woman. Her son, whose name was Turner, later became a political aspirant, never made it to be prime minister. He was Finance Minister. But this is just talking in a sense about the social elite.

The intellectual elite, they also rubbed elbows constantly. As for the senior bureaucrats, our dealings would be only with those in Ottawa. It would be the Consul General in Toronto, the Ontario bureaucrats and so forth. We couldn't have been luckier with our contacts. There was only one senior bureaucrat, very charming, very affable, who my husband didn't quite trust because of his fundamental anti-Americanism. He made Under-Secretary of External Affairs. But he was succeeded by a French Canadian named Marcel Cadieux who couldn't have been easier, no anti-Americanism whatsoever probably because he was French Canadian. A very able man. But we've just always been in close touch with those people, heads of the department of finance, external affairs and so forth.

Q: Were there any major that you can think of, obviously you'd been on the economics side and all, during this time, but you got married in '59, how long were you there with Willis?

ARMSTRONG: We left '62 I think it was.

Q: Was there any economic problems that you can think of?

ARMSTRONG: Well there's always. Fish is always a big problem, both east and west fisheries. We're always invading each other's waters and being accused of doing that. And lumber was an issue of whether, because they have a different tax system for lumber, exploiting and cutting down timber, that it would be selling in the United States at a disadvantage to our lumber people. Must be a half dozen other things. We have the environmental issues always. Our smokestacks are blowing up to Canada, and the acid rain is polluting Canadian lakes. It goes on like that. If you were to subscribe to a publication which is put out by the embassy here, it's very well worth having, I get it free of charge, two-thirds of this monthly report has to do with commercial, economic disputes. It's just a fact of life. They're handled amicably enough.

Q: You must have been in Canada at the time when President Kennedy came up to visit because it's usually Canada, Mexico are the two places that a new president visits.

ARMSTRONG: Yes, this was his first visit out of Washington.

Q: How did that work?

ARMSTRONG: Well my husband was in charge through the embassy. And it worked handsomely thank goodness. We had a certain amount of advice beforehand as to what the president required. For example, down pillows no, he was allergic to down pillows. And we were on easy terms with Government House and it's controller, so he and my husband would get together whenever necessary to discuss the further problems that might arise with the hospitality being offered by government house. And everything went swimmingly. The only time you have a problem is with the Secret Service colliding with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCNP), and that's a universal problem.

Q: Yes, [the Secret Service] are an immovable force.

ARMSTRONG: It went very happily. The only trouble is that Government House was always inviting guests of his stature to plant a tree. And he did that and he hurt his back again.

Q: It put him on crutches when he went to Vienna to meet Khrushchev.

ARMSTRONG: It was a great colossal mistake, and nobody anticipated that. They should have. And Kennedy I guess was too proud to admit that this was something he shouldn't do. What they should have done was have him throw a few pieces of dirt on the tree and not let him dig anything. But everything went swimmingly and here's an amusing note. After Jackie, who of course knocked them all dead - she had the most gorgeous gowns and she looked so positively entrancing, and she had this demure manner of seeming to hold back and be shy, which she may well have been – after she'd gone, the Russian ambassador's wife commented that it was as if she herself, she felt like the grandmother and Mrs. Diefenbaker like the mother. You see Jacqueline brought out maternal instincts in all the right places.

Now we were having problems with John Diefenbaker and of course that consumed the embassy and the office back here. Books have been written about it. First of all we had the advance visit of the president's own mafia. These were all guys who'd been working for him from the time he'd been running for office as senator. And they all seemed to come from Revere Beach and were about that caliber of social attractiveness. But they were his boys and they did some stupid and embarrassing things. But the Kennedys themselves won everybody. One of the stupid things was they had to rent tuxedos, these fellows, they hadn't brought any of their own. And there was a place called Classy Clothes from which they rented their tuxedos. And after this preliminary visit, the proprietary visit was over and the real visit was all but taken place, my husband got a call from Classy Clothes which said, "I found a piece of paper in a pocket and somehow I don't think it's something I should be reading." He was a nice guy.

Q: Well there was that piece of paper that Kennedy had left –

ARMSTRONG: "--that SOB…"

Q: " - that SOB", about Diefenbaker, and Kennedy said "I didn't know he was an SOB at the time."

ARMSTRONG: "I didn't think that at the time." Direct quote. He seemed surprised, quite taken aback. "I didn't think that at the time." That's been in history books, and I couldn't begin to do justice to it all.

Q: How was Mrs. Diefenbaker?

ARMSTRONG: A lovely woman, I liked Olive very much. I didn't dare call her Olive to her face, but I thought she was a splendid woman.

Q: Did you sense, you'd obviously been dealing with the Canadian scene for some time then in one form or the other, where do you think he was coming from in your estimation. John Diefenbaker?

ARMSTRONG: Well I should know this but it was one of the western provinces and of course he was in a sense, provincial, in that respect. And his appointments were of people to the cabinet who had limited foreign experience. And one I particular was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, whose name was Green. And he just needed to be tutored on the job all the time, not only by his own people, but by us. He was always very prickly about what the Americans were up to; he was darkly suspicious. On one occasion, at an Iranian reception, he came up to my husband and he pointed his long bony finger and said, "We must have a talk." Well the entire diplomatic community was all ears. And eventually it developed that what he wanted to talk about was the fact that some Canadian Indians who were sneaking across the border and stealing things, especially from summer camps and stuff, had done this and had been caught in the act by the Americans. And now we held these Indians in our jug, and Green didn't like that. I suppose he would have had to answer to his own constituents; he hadn't been up in arms about it. But this gave him an excuse to be up in arms. And my husband did his best to calm him down. But the next thing that happened came a call from Montreal, from our consulate there and said, "I'm in deep trouble." A group of American businessmen were up here, no, it was a Greek order, of Greek businessmen or whatever their professions were, a Greek social order. They'd gone up to Montreal for a celebration. They'd gone into a local tavern and partied after hours. The hours for closing and serving drinks were very strict. The police raided the place and clapped them all in jail. So when the Consul General from Montreal called up Bill and said, "I'm in a terrible jam," and Bill said, "That's the best news I've heard in a long time." Then he could turn to Green, Howard Green his name was, "What are you doing with my American citizens in jail?"

Q: You're pointing your finger at me, yes.

ARMSTRONG: You're pointing your finger at me about some Indians. What about the Americans who're clapped in jail. So things shook up.

Q: Well did you sense, I talked to people who served in Mexico and they were saying, our ties with Mexico of course are very close too, that the foreign ministry is sort of where a lot of the, particularly at the top, where a lot of the left-wing, sort of anti-Americans end up. Did you have any sense –

ARMSTRONG: It was true in the sense that initially a very distinguished Oxford scholar, Rhodes scholar, was head of the foreign office. The civil servant is the under-secretary. So he had the under-secretary's job for years and years.

Q: Top sort of professional job.

ARMSTRONG: He was venerated in external affairs. He was brilliant and cultivated and so forth. But he was essentially very suspicious of Americans and didn't have sufficient suspicion with respect to the Soviet threat. Livvie Merchant once said about him, "He was a fine man but his instincts were all wrong. So Norman Robertson was his name. He's a Canadian icon, but from the United States standpoint, he was always a problem. Though you'd have this cultural dichotomy frequently of being outstanding Canadians, who were usually distinguished Rhodes Scholars, but they would have a different point of view. I don't think that's true so much any more, but it was then.

Q: One does get the feeling that foreign policy is the one place today where the Canadians sort of like to stick it to the United States in a way. I mean, particularly on Cuba and all.

ARMSTRONG: Cuba is a problem in that sense, but I don't think it worries us. For the most part, we have to give the Canadians credit for standing up to us under a lot of circumstances.

Q: I don't know.

ARMSTRONG: I think by and large we can count on the Canadians. It's just these occasional poobahs that give us a problem. And he was a poobah.

Q: When did you leave Ottawa?

ARMSTRONG: We left in '62. We were also having the problem, and I'm not as well-versed in this, over the extent to which the Canadian military was going to be allowed to develop. Within the military there was a lot of enthusiasm for strengthening their defenses. But we had to share the aerial defense.

Q: Blue Streak, wasn't it?

ARMSTRONG: We had a number of problems because we were their protective shield when it came to flying defenses. And we had radar defenses strung across Canada, and we put them up at our expense too. And the Canadian military were eager to expand but the politicians were eager to cut back the funds. Diefenbaker was one of those that maintained that Canada was being taken advantage of unfairly. I should read up on the history issues there because I really didn't expect to be talking about this. I thought I'd be talking about my own immediate opportunities.

Q: I'm really talking about what you were picking up as essentially a professional in a non-professional job.

ARMSTRONG: I would be more conversant if I had read up on it. It's just a little too long ago. 1960 is, what is it, almost 40 years ago. I can quickly refresh my memory, but I can tell you there were points of exasperation on military issues, largely led by Diefenbaker.

Q: In fact if I recall, he was essentially brought down on –

ARMSTRONG: Yes, he was. On having made a promise, which he denied having made or something like that. And that's very significant. And if you ask a Canadian historian, he'll know in an instant what you're talking about.

Q: This is just on the side for us. To pick up your story, we'll pick it up in '62, when you come back to -

ARMSTRONG: In the meantime, I'll refresh my memories.

End of interview