

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

LORA BERG

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

Q: When and where were you born?

BERG: I was born in November, 1959, in Rochester, New York, in upstate New York.

Q: Let's start with your family. What do you know about the Berg side of the family first? We'll get to your mother next.

BERG: The Berg side came from Warsaw, Poland. My father arrived in the United States on the eve of World War II. He was the only member of his immediate family in Warsaw who made it out. He came without much money and moved in with relatives, most likely second cousins. He got jobs picking up bowling pins in a bowling alley before machines took on that function, and he worked in a paper bag factory. He was a brilliant man, attended Temple University to complete undergraduate studies and later earned a PhD as did my mother, descended from a Russian Jewish family. Her father came to the U.S. early in the 20th century, before the wars. My dad served in U.S. military intelligence during the war and earned his citizenship.

Q: I assume that your father came from the Jewish settlements in the Soviet Union at the time.

BERG: He came from Warsaw, Poland.

Q: Oh, yes, of course. We know what the holocaust did, so he got out just in time.

BERG: He got out just in time. His parents perished in the Warsaw uprising.

Q: Did you ever talk to your father about why he got the hell out?

BERG: I did visit Warsaw with him, and we walked through the city. In his day, Warsaw was not a pleasant place to be a young Jewish talent. I think he said that at the time he was attending a medical school and that the Jewish students had to stand in the back of the class.

Q: There was a very distinct division between Polish society, the Poles and the Jews in Poland, even before the Germans came in.

BERG: He really loved Polish history, culture, language, literature, food, and he thought of himself as a Pole. He kept some cultural orientation, I would say. He would make a little bow when he met people. Because he was born in 1919, his parents would have been Victorian-era people. For me, it is amazing to consider that just one and two generations back, the worldview and opportunities were so different.

Q: I take it he was going to medical school?

BERG: Yes, he was taking medical courses, and of course he was a polyglot as an Eastern European intellectual, speaking French, Polish, some Russian, English and with some orientation in Latin and Greek.

Q: Anyway, he had a real education.

BERG: Yes, he was well educated.

Q: Does he talk about the time he was getting started in the States before going into the military?

BERG: He talks about different odd jobs that he picked up. In his late life, we learned that he had a first, very brief marriage with a Polish countess. I think it wasn't unusual for people to claim to be counts and countesses; we don't really know. As we understood the story, he made this marriage to help the lady obtain U.S. papers, after he was established. On his arrival, he moved in with the relatives, studied and did odd jobs to support himself. His host family lived in Philadelphia. After he served in the military, he continued his education through the GI Bill (U.S. Government benefits, including educational assistance, for military veterans) and attended Columbia University. He met my mother at Woods Hole Oceanographic Laboratory and led a happily married life.

Q: What did he do in the army?

BERG: He served in intelligence and put his languages to use.

Q: That would have made him very useful. How Jewish was your family as far as religious observance and that sort of thing? It wasn't there?

BERG: Not particularly. On my father's side, we were a cosmopolitan, city-dwelling family. The family had been in printing, publishing, paper, and may have brought their skills from Germany to Poland way back. My mother's family was from the pale of Russia and in the photographs, the ancestors appear to be orthodox, but her dad was a physician and Brooklyn and not religiously observant.

Q: What were their names? I mean "Berg" is much more German than Polish.

BERG: Yes, they were the Glicksbergs. He shortened his name at Ellis Island, took off the “Glicks” and just kept “Berg”. He changed his first name from Jerzy to George. My mom had a good Russian first name, Olga. Perhaps they also had private Jewish names, as some of us do, not me and my siblings, and for my parents, I do not know.

Q: On your mother’s side, what’s her background?

BERG: My mother’s dad came from the Pale of Settlement in Russia and came over with his mom. He was a general practitioner in Brooklyn, New York. He came over, he stayed, he went to medical school. He was gentlemanly with a Victorian smoking jacket and a pipe, and he played in a string quartet that met in his brownstone in Brooklyn. He treated many patients for free during the Depression. He married an American Jewish nurse who died when my mother was young. Mother was lady of the house, and she developed a very strong interest in science. Both of my parents were biologists.

I knew only one of my four grandparents: my maternal grandparents, and I was too young to remember. My parents were both only children. Our family is small but recently with DNA tests, I find that I have an unbelievable number of “second or third cousins” spread across the U.S. and I have found family in Poland who are Christian. My father would have been amazed to find relatives in Poland and I wish I could have shared this with him.

Q: Unlike so many people who came to the United States from the Pale and the Jewish sector of Poland, you came from a really well educated family. Your father and mother both had college degrees?

BERG: Yes, they both were university professors.

Q: I’m still interviewing people who came from a generation where very few of the parents of Foreign Service Officers had college degrees. Until World War II only a few percent of the people had college degrees. My parents didn’t, but they were very well read because people read a lot in those days. I imagine books must have been very much a part of your life.

BERG: Yes, books were a big part of our lives. We had a big home library. My maternal grandfather collected books. He liked those sets, so he had such sets as Tolstoy, Molière, the complete Shakespeare. He really liked bronze statues, oriental carpets, and ornate furniture pieces. The house I grew up in was probably in his spirit and his books were everywhere. My dad had a scientific collection of course and loved to read science fiction as well. He had a small Polish library. He loved the Polish language. He was a man without bitterness. He hosted a lot of international visitors for short and long stays at the house. He hosted a German professor for several months. He was such a gracious and inclusive man. I can remember Jewish elders from that time who would not have been comfortable hearing German. In contrast, my father conveyed that history, and the violence of history, must not cause us to stereotype people.

Q: Where did you live?

BERG: We lived in upstate New York. My dad's professorship was at the University of Rochester. My mother was sorry to leave New York City, a city she loved very much, but off they went with him because that's what one did. They built a strong community of friends in Rochester and brought up three children. We are all living good lives, thanks to our parents.

Q: So, as a kid, you grew up in Rochester?

BERG: I did, my whole childhood, seventeen years.

Q: For a young lady, what was Rochester like as a kid at that time?

BERG: At that time, Rochester was a thriving city, home to Eastman Kodak, Xerox and Bausch and Lomb. It declined in the late 20th century due to deindustrialization, but I think Rochester is coming back, even with alternative energy as Plug Power is building there. When I was growing up, we attended the Eastman School of Music's beautiful theater where international performers would visit. We had a symphony and an opera under the stars in the summertime. And there was the University of Rochester library for me to wander. But Rochester was also a cold and snowy place, maybe familiar to my dad in terms of climate.

Q: As a young kid, in elementary school, did you walk to school?

BERG: I rode my bike during three seasons; in winter I rode the school bus.

Q: I mean were there groups of kids that would get together in the afternoon and play?

BERG: I think my parents chose the neighborhood because there was a Jewish presence, and they felt confident about the school. In fact, it was a diverse neighborhood, not in the ways we think about it today. Just around our house, I recall a Greek family, an Italian family, an Irish family, and a Hungarian family living right over the fence behind us. When I grew up, I taught for a little while in another part of the city and was surprised to discover different facets of diversity than in our own neighborhood. So many families were first generation, and it felt quite adventurous and enjoyable at the cultural level.

Q: In my experience, I remember going over to my friends' houses, so many of them smelled differently because of the different types of food they were cooking.

BERG: I'm just trying to think... The map of a kid is about who lives where in the neighborhood. That was my map, where all these different families were located. Certainly we were eating different foods! And some of the homes seemed mysterious to me. Some people put big plates in the middle of the table so we could all eat our fill, and some served a prepared individual dinner plate. Some were loud, some quiet. Altogether I

think I remember childhood as festive (if cold), but that must be due to having kind parents.

Q: Did the prejudice of one group against another play out there?

BERG: No, I really don't think so. There were stereotypes floating, all kinds of rumors floating among the kids, but as we played together, that abated. Going into different children's houses was a real adventure, maybe a prelude for Foreign Service travel.

Q: Well, if you get something international... There was no cohesiveness of one group against another there...

BERG: I don't think so. There was too much variety, not just a and b.

Q: As a kid, were you much of a reader? Do you recall some of the books that you read or any that stick in your mind?

BERG: Yes. We had mounds of *National Geographic* magazines. My mom read the *New Yorker*. She read *Scientific American* with Dad, and Dad read science fiction. I read literature, poetry, short stories, and novels. Dad read science fiction; we had all the *Analog*. I had fairy tale books when I was little. We also had all those sets from my Grandfather and I would enjoy those books. Dad read to us. He read to us from *The Iliad*, *The Anger of Achilles*. He liked to read things out loud to us. We had *The Little Prince*, a beautiful copy of *The Little Prince*. I was interested in British royal history, which would indicate that we were pretty adapted into an Anglo world.

Q: How was your elementary school?

BERG: It was a fine public school. I made friends there and have positive memories.

Q: I assume you were a good student.

BERG: I was a good student. There were a lot of good students there, even some brilliant ones.

Q: A lot of families from both the Eastman complex and from the University of Rochester probably were going there.

BERG: Yes, there were University kids at the school. I didn't know much about parents and professions. I was interested in theater, music, art, literature, and dance.

Q: As a kid, how did your family fit in politically?

BERG: My parents voted for Democratic candidates, and my mom served in the League of Women Voters. My mom admired Eleanor Roosevelt. Our newspaper was the *Democrat and Chronicle*, the Rochester newspaper, and my mother would try so hard to

get a hold of *The New York Times*. It was a different time, so you couldn't get things so easily. I'm surprised when I think back that we really relied on the local paper for news.

Q: Do you have brothers or sisters?

BERG: I have a brother and a sister. I was the youngest in the family. My sister started her own consultancy, and my brother became an engineer.

Q: Did you sit around the dining room table and discuss the events of the day?

BERG: Really, my parents discussed articles in *Scientific American*. My parents were truly fascinated by science. My mom felt that people should talk about ideas, not people, an attitude to unlearn as a political officer.

Q: How did you feel about it?

BERG: Of the three of us, none studied science, but we all have an appreciation for it. My parents were environmental activists as well, founding the Rochester Committee for Scientific Information. The goal was to unveil environmental problems. My mom would take me out in a canoe and she would pick up water samples, test them and then expose what the factories were putting into our waterways. She was an environmental activist before her time. That was the very beginning of the environmental movement. I would help her to prepare mailings, get meetings ready, etc. That was where more of their curiosity lay. I think others in their group focused more on the political aspects, and my parents on the science.

Q: Did you get involved in helping pass out leaflets?

BERG: I helped her to get mailings ready and to go out, observe and collect data. They would spend some evenings writing articles together on a Smith Corona electric, writing and editing together. They had quite a harmonious marriage, cultural and scientific affinities and pleasure in the academic life.

Q: Did you hear from your family that they were being challenged by the powers that be?

BERG: Yes. We had a sense of who was on their side of the issue. But it was a small city and leaned Democratic. The only political arguments I remember were with an economist friend of my dad's from the University of Rochester who was a follower of Milton Friedman. My parents didn't tend to think that the free market alone would solve the issues of the day.

Q: People who dump stuff in the drinking water and all that are not doing it to be mean, they're doing it to earn a living.

BERG: Yes, but there are better ways, so they did talk about politics in that sense. They were politically engaged, I would say, at the local level in that way, to sort out who could and would make positive decisions for the environment.

Q: Where did you get your news? TV was coming on...

BERG: We did not watch TV news. We read the *Democrat and Chronicle*. There were three TV stations. We had a black and white TV. We didn't watch broadcast news together as a family, but we were allowed thirty minutes or so of tv, and I loved some of the series, such as the Avengers, featuring a British lady secret agent with pizzazz.

Q: How about radio? Was that more important?

BERG: I don't think we were in that zone, honestly. Current events got some play, but not a lot. My dad liked to listen to jazz. We had a record player, and my siblings had coveted records by The Beatles. I liked the soundtracks of musicals.

Q: How about newspapers?

BERG: Just that one, and when my mom could get it, *The New York Times*. The *New Yorker* magazine was my mom's favorite magazine and she subscribed. She loved the profiles about successful people who were doing good things in the world. And she liked to feel closer to her beloved city.

Q: Did any world figures who were dominating the stage at that time attract you or your family? Gandhi would have been earlier, but some of the other things that were happening in the world?

BERG: I would not say that we were oriented toward the external world very much, with the exception of a family fondness for Kennedy, and a memory of sadness around MLK's assassination. There was life, the life of the mind, life of science, life of environmental activism. There wasn't really discussion about the Holocaust. I did mention that we went way back to *The Iliad* and had conversations about ancient realpolitik, but really way back when. The draft into Vietnam ended when I was 13 or 14. My sisters' peers were on the tail end of the draft, and she would recount a very different experience than I am recounting here. And I believe my parents worried for my brother, but he was too young to be caught up in the draft. My generation's mindset was post-sixties in our teen years. We were called the me-generation, which didn't feel so good, but we were viewed as less politically active than the generation before us.

And we were not a politically oriented family. My parents were patriotic toward the United States, took pride in what this country offers, and wanted us to be thankful for our families' good fortune to be here. We decorated our bikes on July 4 and had a fine parade. Otherwise, my world-out-there was constructed through National Geographic and social studies class. We didn't have a lot of money and our holiday trips were mostly in the station wagon, sometimes with a tent on board. We were able to drive to Toronto. And

when I was 9, we did go on holiday in Europe with our Europe-on-five-dollars a day book, staying with friendly professors here and there. I went back to Paris one summer as a teenager on my own to stay with the family of an Au Pair student who had stayed with us, and I cried often, being unaccustomed to the distance from my parents. When I returned to Paris with the Foreign Service, I certainly did not cry! The city is forever in my heart.

Q: Did Israel strike a chord?

BERG: Not so much, but we had one branch of the family, one relative made it with his wife to Israel and had a daughter there who came to stay with us for one year. So, we had a family connection, but it wasn't discussed. I think my dad sent some money for Israel related causes in his later years. My memory is that I learned about the Holocaust from a book with photographs of the camps and after felt a subliminal sense of worry for my family. That's how intergenerational trauma works, not always through the direct sharing of stories.

We hosted au pair exchange students from France for two years. So, there were international young people who were part of the family. But I would not say that my parents were politically oriented.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

BERG: Brighton High, in Rochester, New York.

Q: What sort of high school was it?

BERG: It was a public high school, a thousand students maybe.

Q: How did you find that school?

BERG: My high school social studies teacher was just back from Peace Corps in Latin America. He taught us about native peoples and gave us perspectives into American history different from what we were reading in text books. That was very exciting and also made me feel sorrow. The world would slowly open in all its complexity.

Q: Did you get involved in any extracurricular activities?

BERG: Yes, I played the oboe and I wrote poetry. I was the editor of the literary magazine and I was in the theater. So, more on the arts side of the house.

Q: Did you have a special interest in the various studies in high school?

BERG: I loved the arts. And then as mentioned my social studies teacher got me thinking.

Q: Did the field of diplomacy ever show on your radar?

BERG: No, there was never any real sign that I would get interested in diplomacy. I grew up around a lot of smart people and sometimes I used to think it would be nice to be some place where I could be useful to people. I used to think that everybody knew so much more than me. How would I make a difference? And being somewhere with a different knowledge base seemed like a good idea, where I could put what I had to good use.

Q: But you did realize that there was another world out there where people weren't as informed as the group you were associated with?

BERG: Well, it did look like maybe if I were in a different context, I would have more to offer. I think it was sometimes a little bit overwhelming to be a young person around these university professors who had such conviction that they knew so much. And of course, they did know a lot! Though today, information is at our fingertips, it wasn't then and the professors were quite encyclopedic.

Q: I'm sure these were not shy people.

BERG: No, they had a lot of conviction. Everybody knew so much and they had so much certainty. To this day, I am uncomfortable with academic argumentation. I like to build consensus.

Q: Well, that had to be a bit daunting for a young woman.

BERG: Daunting. It was hard to hold one's own as a child, that's for sure. Looking back on it, it was funny that people had so much conviction back then. With the tools we have now to access knowledge it's just clear that nobody really has a monopoly on particular subject areas anymore. The approach to knowledge now feels much more open to me. But maybe those old-world professors who had lost their entire communities to the war felt they had to preserve and carry so much forward. There was a lot of weight to carry.

Q: Particularly with the Internet and all, it's now possible to check on facts.

BERG: Yes, it's a little harder to hold forth the way people used to. But the other thing is that they really did know a lot and especially those with the Eastern European trained academic mind. It's a thing of beauty. They had that incredible ability to remember, to access things from their memory when there wasn't an Internet. That was really something amazing, all of that knowledge in one mind. They were very amazing people based in a beautiful tradition. When I took Slovak here at the Foreign Service Institute with Verona Conant, I felt that familiar sense of awe at such a well-structured mind. Just listening to her, her references, the way she offers insights and the knowledge she brings made me feel lucky to study with her.

Q: I talk to many people who've come out of the Eastern European milieu. The idea of sitting around the table with a bottle of vodka and discussing events or discussing big matters is not something that we do in America normally. It's a damned good exercise, if nothing else. Obviously you were going to go to higher education. I don't think there was ever a doubt. Where did you want to go and where did you go?

BERG: I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Old friends of my parents were teaching at Duke (University) and I went down to visit. It was springtime and the magnolia trees were in bloom. I was coming from Rochester. I think that just struck a chord. I was pretty stunned by the beauty. My focus at the time was on music and language, so the fit turned out well. The University of Rochester provided some tuition support for faculty children, so we were able to make it work out.

Q: Incidentally, how did you find the snow? Do you have any stories about the snow up in Rochester?

BERG: It just snowed all the time. What I remember was that our house was cold. The windows were different back then. They were single-paned windows that just didn't keep the cold out and the frost would grow on the windows. Do you remember that? Windows had frost growing all over them, so you knew that the cold was right there, right up against you all the time. And we dug snow and shoveled driveways. I was sick with some regularity. I honestly enjoyed going to school in the south.

Q: There's a good, solid reason why there's been a general exodus to what they call the sunbelt. Well, North Carolina University has an excellent reputation. What kind of subject were you taking there?

BERG: I was still involved in the arts. I spoke French, so when I went to college I took Spanish, and Portuguese. I liked the Romance languages, poetry; I was in the orchestra, in the wind quintet, writing poetry and taking poetry seminars, and leaning toward the arts. I was still really involved in the arts then, good groundwork for a future cultural attaché.

Q: How did you find the society of the university?

BERG: I met during my freshman orientation a young Polish woman and we became best friends, we roomed together, and she became a linguistics professor. I also roomed with a young woman who's here now and my neighbor, who was studying to become a folklorist. We were all more in the arts and humanities. That's where our brains were.

Q: Was the civil rights movement... Had it pretty well done its thing by the time you got there or was it ongoing?

BERG: I couldn't have been more disconnected at that stage of my life from things political. I was completely ignorant about politics and power. Truly, truly. I just was living in my world, publishing my poems and playing oboe. I brought a lot of advanced

credit with me. I did my college in three years and spent one of my years abroad. So I was in North Carolina for two years total and spent one year in Spain. If I have to point to the time when I started to become aware of politics, it would be my year abroad.

Q: Had you been abroad before that?

BERG: Yes, I spent that summer in France with friends of the family when I was thirteen.

Q: What year was that?

BERG: I don't really remember. 1972?

Q: The big student movement of '68 had already passed.

BERG: If there was a political awakening it was my year in Spain. That was right after Franco. My university pals there were self-identifying as anarchists, whatever they meant by that, and they were demonstrating. It was 1978-79.

Q: Where were you studying?

BERG: I studied in Seville in the south of Spain. I was in with a group of young people whose families were thrown out of Morocco when the Spanish colonial period ended. They were open to outsiders. They were demonstrating, missing Morocco and missing the lives they had before. I think I just started to realize that there were political things going on and that there was a world out there. I visited Morocco with my pals. But I was still studying medieval poetry and everything esoteric that I could find. And of course, flamenco dancing. But life was starting to open windows, I would say.

Q: I take it you became more involved in student concerns, student life in Spain than you were back in North Carolina.

BERG: Yes. The world opened slowly to me, but I came along.

Q: For European students for the most part, almost as part of the curriculum, was activism. Did you get any feel for the post-Franco government at that time, how it ran?

BERG: I remember the young people being disdainful about religion, frustrated with old people, churches, and associating all of that with Franco. I remember their frustration with security forces. I remember their frustration with the powers that be.

Q: The students weren't very Catholic, were they?

BERG: No, no, they really associated the church with oppression.

Q: Anarchists don't cotton to the Catholic Church. Did you have any contact with the U.S. embassy, or even think about it?

BERG: No, I don't think I even knew it even existed.

Q: You came back to the States, full of anarchism and poetry?

BERG: Really missing the adventure, probably. I came back to the United States and finished my degree. In 1980 I went with my best friend to a town in Kenya to teach – Meru, Kenya.

Q: Where? The island?

BERG: No, near Mount Meru in Kenya.

Q: What brought you to Kenya?

BERG: My best friend was going to teach in Kenya and we went together after college.

Q: Did you get involved in teaching there too?

BERG: I taught English, math.

Q: Was this a village or town?

BERG: It was a town.

Q: How did you find the students? How well prepared were they?

BERG: It was a school for students who didn't make it in the public school. Their parents were paying a little money for them to try to get them through their exams. Some made it! I am still in touch with one who has become very successful and built a beautiful family, which makes me happy.

Q: Was there a struggle with the teachers trying to educate them and the students not very interested in their education?

BERG: They were from farming families around the area. A few were really promising which gave hope.

Q: How did you find the school authorities? Sometimes the school authorities resent outsiders.

BERG: No, it wasn't like that. I felt welcome. We ate there, all of us, beans and maize cooked in a huge oil barrel, and sometimes tripe. The kids had green uniforms and a minister would show up once a week on a motorbike to lead prayers. But the system was

really different. I was shocked to see students being beaten. And the environment was kind of tough. There were bed bugs, so the teachers had their own chairs that they would carry with them from classroom to classroom because they would try to keep chairs that didn't have any bed bugs. I didn't want to beat anyone, so I needed to figure out my own way. But they were full of curiosity, so that worked in my favor. I remember that when the President was coming to town, we had to line kids up on the street and we waited for hours.

Q: How long were you there?

BERG: I was there for one school year. During that year I made a library for the school and I made a library for Meru town. This is when I got interested in the U.S. embassy, because I found out there was a cultural attaché and the cultural attaché could help me get books for the library. I went to the United States and people from my city sent books. Then I went to the embassy and the embassy made a gift of books for the library. At the time I thought, that's a really great job! You work in an office and give books away to help schools. That sounded like a plum job to me.

Q: It's been one of our most successful programs and certainly a delightful one.

BERG: Yes. By then I was 20, I probably turned 21 in Africa. I can't really remember. So that was my education.

Q: Did you ask people how you get into this or were you looking?

BERG: Not at the time but I remember that a light went on, thinking what a great job. What a great thing to do. I'm trying to get books for this little library and this person is able to give books to all of these libraries. The students and I made a little library with lending cards and put the cards in the back of the books and set up the lending system for the town. We did one for Meru, the town, and one for the school. And then I wrote a little pamphlet about how to set up a library for a Kenyan School, with resources others could use. That was my year in Kenya.

Q: It's one of the opportunities one can have to get out there. Was the Peace Corps in Kenya too?

BERG: Yes, the Peace Corps was there.

Q: Did you get involved with them at all?

BERG: I knew and enjoyed the company of Peace Corps volunteers.

Q: You came back after a year.

BERG: I came back. There I was with a bachelor's degree. I didn't know what I really wanted to do. The light was starting to go on that everything wasn't about poetry and

painting, and oboes, and maybe there was something else out there. So I went back to school for a little while at the University of Rochester where I could go for free. I took, for the first time, political science, political philosophy, constitutionalism, and I think I started to open my mind up to what makes the world tick. That's about when I opened up to political systems and this was exciting for me.

Q: Did you find yourself up against a different group of students?

BERG: No, it wasn't about that. It was trying to work on my mind. It was looking at the campus and realizing that there were the arts, and then this whole other world that I really hadn't considered.

Q: You came to take a look at the role of America in the world?

BERG: Yes. I also noticed because I had just spent a year in a country where I was the one white person in a black community, and I came back and walking across the campus I would see black students and they didn't seem immediately to be warm and friendly as people had been in Kenya. I thought, what's wrong in this country? Over there, I didn't seem to feel all this tension, and over here there's this tension. What's going on? Why is this? All of these light bulbs and questions and wonderings started to blink.

Q: Did this get you involved in any way?

BERG: I went to be a substitute teacher in a city school in Rochester around then working with kids in one of those schools that was considered a "school to prison" pipeline school. The kids were delightful and open. There wasn't anything linear, but I was thinking more and more about things. My sister had gone to Antioch (University), which was in turmoil when she attended. So, maybe information was pouring into my mind at an angle. I had a very slow political awakening, but once it happened, I've been on that path ever since. I guess I've been on a path related to inclusion and equity ever since.

Q: Did you have professors who acted as sort of mentors with whom you could...?

BERG: They got me curious enough while I was there that I decided to go to Johns Hopkins (University), to SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies). Somehow it happened that year in Rochester, at the University of Rochester. I left Rochester, and I went to SAIS. I really did take great courses, international relations, political science, political theory, economics, trying to get an understanding of the world.

Q: Were you able to sample the delights of Washington, going to the Senate hearings and other things?

BERG: One awakening I had was a course with Fouad Ajami, when I learned for the first time about the Palestinian cause. I had never heard a negative word about Israel, and I felt shocked by what he said. So the idea that stories have more than one side arose. I

went to SAIS, but followed this with a year at Johns Hopkins main campus in an MFA program. Then I went to be a poet in residence at the Saint Albans School, and while I was at Saint Albans, I felt that it was time to get back out into the world. So, I thought, why don't I take the Foreign Service exam? I was clearly not linear with my life path. My brain was really very involved in the arts and yet very curious about countries in the world. I wanted to be a cultural attaché, to bring these paths together.

Q: You keep mentioning poetry. Were you a published poet?

BERG: Yes. I was a published poet. That was what I liked at the time. I'm publishing again now with regularity.

Q: What happened? Did you take the exam?

BERG: I took the exam and joined the Foreign Service.

Q: You took the oral exam, right?

BERG: Yes.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions that were asked?

BERG: I remember the group activity. I remember the in-box.

Q: In the group activity, you had to resolve a budgetary crisis and all?

BERG: Yes, we had a budget and had to divvy up (to apportion the budget fairly).

Q: Had you talked to anybody, whether at SAIS, or anywhere, about the Foreign Service and what it was like, or did you pretty well know what you wanted to do and you didn't need to get more information.

BERG: I'm just thinking about that whole period at SAIS. I took Japanese; I took international relations theory. I was interested in everything the school had to offer and didn't have enough time. And I was valedictorian, made the speech about bringing together the left and right hands, bringing together analytical and creative parts of the mind. I was just trying to understand the world.

Q: Taking the students from your year in Spain, and graduate students and all, it was pretty popular to condemn the United States for being rude and crass and all that. Did that rub off on you?

BERG: Anti-Americanism from the year abroad? That particular crowd was more focused on Spain, and what was left of the regime and the structures of the Franco regime. They were anti-capitalist. Anti-American? I wouldn't say that was the dominant theme over there at that time. SAIS students were largely career oriented. Many

were going to investment banks at that time. Some went on to become diplomats, professors, international development specialists.

Q: When you took the exam, this was for USIA (United States Information Agency) I guess.

BERG: I just took the regular exam.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service in what year?

BERG: June of 1986.

Q: What was your class like? Was the USIA class a separate class?

BERG: I had a wonderful A-100 class! We joined up with a USIA cohort. We still meet and enjoy each other's company.

Q: How did you find your first basic officer course?

BERG: Has anyone else mentioned to you that it was kind of xenophobic in teaching about visa work, at the time? Has anyone mentioned that to you?

Q: No, I don't think so.

BERG: Do you remember anything about that when you were supposed to pretend that you were a visa applicant and people would be so... Does this ring any bells with you? Nobody said anything about it? How the foreign applicant would be caricatured? I hope that the us/them approach is no longer in the training, either explicit or implicit.

Q: When I came in, 1955, John Foster Dulles... When I was in the first class there had been a hiatus as we were class number one because of (U.S. Senator Joseph) McCarthy and all that. I came in, it was a difficult time because we really felt under close scrutiny by the security people to make sure we weren't subversives or homosexual. I'm not sure which was their higher concern.

BERG: We've come a long way.

Q: Oh yes! By doing these oral histories I've certainly seen the rise of women. I've come to the personal conclusion that we've reached a tipping point where women are going to be taking more and more power, and that's just going to be a bad thing.

BERG: I heard that about, I can't remember, one of the ministries, where women are some 80 percent of the diplomatic corps and it was becoming difficult to recruit men because diplomacy has become identified in this particular country as a female profession... Professions get gendered and then it's hard to attract people to them of different genders. It's nice to have balance.

Q: I agree. Both sides have great strengths and you can use them and balance them. We're going through a very slow revolution, whether it's a good revolution or a bad revolution. I feel rather comfortable with it, but I'm not going to be around to see the real outcome.

BERG: I think balance is the goal, right?

Q: Balance is the goal. That could be the goal, but one very seldom reaches the goal. At the time you came in, in the 1980s, women were such a rarity. Did you feel there was a glass ceiling? That you were going to be limited in what you could do?

BERG: I don't think I was thinking about it in that way. I didn't really start thinking about what it was like to be a woman in the Foreign Service until I retired. I look back and think it was quite challenging in some ways to be a woman in the Foreign Service, but it didn't dawn on me until years later.

Q: For one thing, you've got the marriage problem, which really has been one of the most divisive elements. It's part of society, yet marriage doesn't usually work too well where both the male and the female can have equal roles. Before, in my era, when you came in, the wife came in and she was very much an integral part of the system, but she wasn't paid. It was often the case, oh Joel's a pretty good guy but it's his wife who's really the brains of the family.

BERG: Yes, they were working as a team.

Q: That's broken down now.

BERG: I don't know about that. What was hard in my time was just plain sexism without a grounding in what it was or what to do about it. Women today are better prepared in that regard. And it used to be hard on male spouses because there weren't many. But I think that is better now. And I think spouses still support each other's ambitions and goals overseas when the marriage is working right. And I think it works out fine when the spouses have equal roles. It just means you might need to cater, but the kids in daycare. But that's true at home too. And the Foreign Service posts also offer a lot of support, a close community.

I like to write, obviously, I was always writing, that's what I did. I didn't write about politics before I came into the Foreign Service. After my consular tour I was a reporting officer and I got to write. I would go talk to people and then I would write. I loved writing cables and learned to write about politics. When WikiLeaks happened you saw how much these Foreign Service officers loved to write! In that sense, it was a good profession for a writer. On my political tour, I got to write, write, and write.

Q: Did you find yourself fitting into the A-100 (Foreign Service training class designation for new entering class)?

BERG: I think I was an outlier because my Myers-Briggs (Type Indicator personality inventory) test wasn't close to anybody else's, an INFP. I'm not that typical a profile for the Foreign Service. But I made excellent friends.

Q: I think you think more, you're concerned about the right hand and left hand bringing things together more than I think most Foreign Service people do.

BERG: Yes, it was a little different, but it was a lot of fun, they're so level and so smart and so curious. There's an aspect of it, it was very exciting.

Q: A book that came out in the 1940s or 1950s, a history of the early Foreign Service called, A Pretty Good Club, and, in a way, what really strikes a note is when you're dealing with Foreign Service people you're almost guaranteed to find good companionship, real concern about things, and people who can carry on a conversation, rather than be sort of bombastic. I find it so difficult to understand that we're going through an election process where Donald Trump is on his way as we speak to being the Republican candidate, and yet he is so removed from the Foreign Service type of mind, full of misinformation and bombast. And yet all of this seems to strike a very responsive note in the American public, which I find terribly disturbing.

BERG: Yes. Everybody wants easy answers because we have very complex problems right now and people are frightened.

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

BERG: My first post was Bridgetown, Barbados. Yes, I asked for Turkey, I asked for China. Bridgetown wasn't on my list. They told me I was going to Bridgetown, Barbados. I called my sister and started to cry. I wanted to go somewhere exciting where I was going to learn a new language, but they sent me to Bridgetown. My sister said, "What are you crying for? You're going to go to Bridgetown, Barbados!" Then I started to learn about Barbados and it was a great tour, but it just wasn't the adventure I had in mind. Barbados is a lovely, very small country with well-educated people.

Q: OK, well we'll be talking about Barbados.

Q: Today is August 12, 2016. I think we've come to the point when you were coming into the Foreign Service. When did you come in?

BERG: June, 1986.

Q: What was your entry class like – the group you were getting your training with? How did it strike you?

BERG: Oh, we had a great class. We were diverse in age, gender, race – not as much as we should have been, but more than probably earlier classes – and profession. People had come to us from journalism, the law, from across the nation.

Q: I take it you started there as a USIA (U.S. Information Agency) class and then as a State Department class. Did you meet together from time to time?

BERG: I started as a State officer, in the political cone. We had a great USIA contingent too.

Q: How did you find the entry into this world? Most people didn't know anything about it when they got enlisted into the thing. A-100 (designation for an entry class) is partly to tell you what you're going to be doing. How did the work strike you? Was there any particular element that sounded more interesting than another?

BERG: From the training program? I think we were team building. We were learning a lot about the world just as we went through the process of sorting out what those assignments would be like. And we learned about consular work.

Q: Where did you want to serve?

BERG: I wanted to serve in China. I wanted to serve in Turkey. I wanted to serve someplace where I would learn a difficult language in a big, complex, important and ancient country. I was assigned to Bridgetown, Barbados. I was taken aback. I didn't expect to go to Bridgetown.

Q: You were in Bridgetown from when to when?

BERG: I was in Bridgetown for.... First assignments back then were 18 months? I must have started in late summer 1986.

Q: It depends, but about 18 months, something like that.

BERG: I went down to do visas because Bridgetown then was a visa issuing embassy serving the island nations. So people would fly in from all these different islands to get their interviews.

Q: So you were doing visa work?

BERG: It was my first tour, so I was assigned to do the visa work.

Q: What was the visa work like? How did you find it?

BERG: It was very difficult for me. We were a post that was a high volume post where we had to say no quite a lot. People had a lot of family in the United States, so they would want to be flying up. It was a complicated post and I do recall that the consul

there – once you did issue a visa – he put in place an unlimited, I think it was a 10 year visa so that once you made the decision you were really putting somebody in an open travel situation for an extended period of time. So, they were pretty careful on the front end. It was hard, my goodness, it was hard because people would tell you that they're going to visit their dying relatives, and people would tell you that their children were up there. People were telling you all kinds of sad things and you were supposed to figure out if people were telling you the truth or not. I found it difficult.

Q: I also think, as a consular officer by background, that most people who come into the Foreign Service have never been faced with having to make a decision as important as this, and, two, being lied to. We've all been told that lies are bad, but if I had been in the position of these immigrants I would have lied too. It wasn't a bad thing, you just happened to be an obstacle getting in the way. It's very hard because you can't help but bear the scars of being nasty.

BERG: It wasn't an easy job. We had a political appointee who was ambassador at the time. He wasn't really enjoying the embassy environment and decided that he was going to conduct his work from his residence. We had to set up a system to shuttle the classified traffic back and forth to the residence. It needed to be hand-carried. For a while I was off the line because I was identified as his staff assistant. What it meant was running the classified cables back and forth from the residence. The consul was very frustrated because it was already a high volume post, the ambassador didn't want to come in, one of the junior officers had to go back and forth to the house. That was Bridgetown... Cruise ship deaths to report, gallivanting visitors.

Q: What was life like there?

BERG: Barbados is a lovely country, the people are well-educated, they have a British style school system. They, of course, are a very small independent nation. They are still less than 300,000 people, about the size of my hometown. They were really small. But they had a Prime Minister, a Foreign Minister, and the whole... It's like Andorra, or one of those small principalities. It was small, it was charming, quite delightful people. They're a little bit reserved, they have a little bit of British reserve, a nice arts life, beautiful nature, it was lovely. I quite enjoyed the people, and we were also working the other island nations around – St. Lucia... We had five island nations to serve. Some of the embassy staff would dispatch around to do their reporting and of course, Grenada was there. There had been our 1983 invasion in Grenada, so that still reverberated.

Q: That wasn't too far removed from the time you were there.

BERG: Not too far. So there was the perception that although a country might be small it could still be critically important to U.S. interests.

Q: Was there much of an American presence there, of Americans settling there, retiring?

BERG: More tourism, not too much settling. The British more. There was a British contingent.

Q: Did you get involved in the care and feeding of tourists?

BERG: Yes. It's a big cruise ship destination; people die on cruise ships. They board the cruise ship at a delicate time in life. Officers had to go down and do that work. We had occasionally, I think we had Mick Jagger's wife (referring to Jerry Hall, Mick Jagger's then companion) who ended up in prison overnight on drug charges. There were things happening all the time on the American citizen services front. From a consular point of view, it was a very busy post. People don't expect their posts to be sometimes as demanding as they are.

Q: Yes, when you think of the islands you think of sitting under a palm tree sipping a drink and every once in a while you sign something or something like that. What about the ambassador, outside of this idea of doing work out of his house, did he have the respect of the staff? You're shaking your head.

BERG: I've had amazing, positive experiences with appointees. Some of the most driven, productive, dedicated people I've come across, but that wasn't one of the cases.

Q: Well, he's off in the islands and it's not considered a particularly challenging post.

BERG: I think he was in real estate.

Q: I've had the same experience. The political appointees I've served with I've had a great deal of respect for. They've really brought something to the job. Did you have any cases or problems that particularly stick in your mind?

BERG: Well, I guess drug dealing. If someone would come in decked out in gold chains you'd think that even a young officer would pick up that something was not quite right. It took me a while to figure out how to tell the differences between people and what people might be traveling for.

Q: Did one of the other officers sit by your side for a while, speaking out of the corner of his mouth...?

BERG: Yes, to help me get oriented. And we had CODELS (U.S. Congressional delegations) because we were in Barbados.

Q: Yes, it doesn't strike me as being the center of American concern. Did you get involved in the care and feeding of CODELS?

BERG: I got involved in the care and feeding of CODELS. I remember going out for the first time to one of those little planes when the CODEL was landing, standing by the staircase and the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee coming down the stairs.

It was exciting for me. I didn't have any government experience before that. I was very impressed with everybody. I thought everything was so important! It was exciting.

Q: This is it. In the Foreign Service you do get involved, even as a briefcase carrier or a bystander.

BERG: Yes, you're part of something bigger, so it's exciting. Even in Bridgetown.

Q: Did you get involved at all with USIA type work?

BERG: Not there, no. I really was on a visa mill. But I did write a book with an artist I met on Carriacou Island, Mr. Canute Caliste, published by Macmillan Caribbean.

Q: Did you find your other visa officers supportive?

BERG: Yes, the junior officers were a team. The junior officers stuck together.

Q: Often people come away from these consular assignments and say "it was very hard work, but we were a team". It's one of the few times in the Foreign Service when you are all really working together. You've got a big crowd waiting out there, but you've got to go through it and it's a nasty job, and you're all having to do it. Did you find yourself having to be careful in your social life? Were there people coming after you, to be nice to you in order to...?

BERG: Not in Bridgetown. As mentioned, they really are quite reserved and polite people. Incidentally, the island has produced some wonderful poets.

Q: Interesting. You wouldn't think of island people being reserved.

BERG: It's a little bit of that British thing. They are very delightful people. And I thought they had quite a strong education system.

Q: After that where did you go?

BERG: I went to Tunisia. I went to Tunisia with my French language and as a political officer. I went on a team with Ambassador Pelletreau (Robert H. Pelletreau) and Edmund Hull, who later became U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, and I joined that world of Arabists. I learned Arabic while I was there, so I went into the post language program. I was a junior political officer with a human rights portfolio. At the time that the regime changed there was a coup. President Ben Ali (Zine El Abidine Ben Ali) took over. It was 1987. He became President and was the person who was recently the subject of the first revolution of the Arab spring.

Q: I just finished interviewing Gordon Gray (Gordon Gray III) who was our ambassador in Tunisia when Ben Ali was deposed.

BERG: I was there when Ben Ali began his rule.

Q: How did you find being a woman working in an Arabic country at this time?

BERG: There was a cadre of women working as Arabists who were very successful Foreign Service officers, able to work on both sides of the gender divide. In terms of actual ability to maneuver, it's really OK. There are other complications, but from a reporting point of view, as a reporting officer, it was fine to be a woman and fine to be a young woman because I had a lot of access.

Q: In a way, you were sort of a novelty. The Arabs are very polite people.

BERG: You're an honorary man when you're with men, and you're a woman when you're with women, so you can get by on both sides of this conversation.

Q: And, of course, you are representing America, so you're not inconsequential, you ARE consequential.

BERG: Of course, I had the human rights portfolio, and the human rights situation wasn't so good. It got a lot worse as he went on in his tenure, but he did come into his coup from directing in the Ministry of Interior. He was not really a nice guy and I never really understood – and I still don't understand – why the United States was as patient as we were with him for as long. I really don't know. To this day, I don't know. I remember he disappointed Ambassador Pelletreau with his actions... Being American, being nicely brought up in America, you still, someplace in your brain, think people are going to do the right thing if they can. He had just taken over and there was an expectation somehow that he was going to do the right thing. But he didn't. He didn't. And it went on for decades.

Q: Were you there during the coup?

BERG: No, just after.

Q: From your perspective as a human rights officer, what were the problems?

BERG: There was still abuse and torture in the prisons. There was still a justice system that was corrupt and it only went downhill. If I'd understood right, Bourguiba (Habib Bourguiba, President of Tunisia 1957-1987) put a lot of amazing legislation and substance into place in Tunisia that brought it into the modern world – just basic things, women's rights, and funny things you wouldn't think about -- adoption. In the Arab world adoption isn't understood; you don't adopt, you take people under your protection. He put adoption into place. He put a lot of family-related things into place that were harmonized with a more Western perspective. He was popular, but he aged in place and became more and more rigid and started slipping. Tunisia was a *de facto* one-party state.

Q: Were you just reporting or trying to get changes then?

BERG: Well, as I said, it was a new government and I think there was some optimism of the United States, like always, that this new government was going to be nice. But it wasn't. I was there during a defining time when we were actually being disappointed by a new government. Things were unfolding, what kind of system Ben Ali was going to put in place. Nobody really wanted to see what was happening because it was disappointing. We would present our report and press for changes without success.

Q: Did you have discussions with others at the embassy and were you all trying to figure out what the hell should we be doing?

BERG: Well, I think we were, yes. It was more in the French domain, of course. And Europe, Italy is closest geographically. The United States' interests at the time were particularly focused on the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) presence in Tunisia. PLO was located there; that was where the headquarters was. When we were there, we were interested in what Tunisia was doing. Tunisia itself was a place with a significant Jewish population, always with an Israeli connection. It was an interesting little place for somewhere so small. When I was there I think it was seven million people perhaps. There were these regional political interests that were a focus for the United States, but Tunisia itself, its economy, not of such interest to us.

Q: The human rights abuses were coming from the Ben Ali government rather than from Sharia law or anything?

BERG: It was a *de facto* one-party system. If you weren't in the party you were threatening; if you were in the opposition, you needed to be managed and controlled. He briefly allowed the so-called Islamist party to become legal when he first took over, but mostly he smoked everybody out and then he started throwing people in prison. He was throwing people in prison, people were being abused. Courts were like kangaroo courts. It was unpleasant. There were police everywhere in these black trucks with German shepherds in back. Tunisia was a mixed bag. It was a beautiful place. It still had a lot of traditional culture at the time, but politically speaking it was complicated and could be brutal. I remember student demonstrations and I saw a tear gas canister that had U.S. markings on it, from us to the students. It upset me.

Q: How did you go about your business?

BERG: I just called everybody, met everybody, and walked around and met people on the campus. I remember going for my first time as a political officer and being told we want to know what young people are thinking. So I walked over to the university and just started talking to people. My supervisor was very... He said, that's not really how we... My idea was to report like a journalist, but it wasn't quite that open an environment.

Q: How were you viewed at the university? Would they talk to you?

BERG: Yes. I think there was an assumption that I was a CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) agent. Everybody was a CIA agent theoretically, from the United States, even the Peace Corps volunteers, we were all CIA I suppose, as far as the local population was concerned.

Q: How about the French? This was French turf in a way. What were they doing and did we work with them?

BERG: I had the internal portfolio. My portfolio was reporting on internal politics, so I didn't do so much networking with the other missions. I was really out and about talking with the political opposition, doing trip reports. I traveled everywhere in Tunisia and met with local leaders, community leaders and I think I was a pretty good reporting officer. I would get these kudos from Washington and feel very good when I would get those kudo messages, little pats on the back. People were very encouraging; I was doing a lot of reporting. I went down to the border with Libya. I did a report on the Libyan border and about what was going on there. I did a report on the Algerian border. I went to Kasserine.

At the time there were doctors in Tunisia from Czechoslovakia. We had to write up if we ever met somebody from Czechoslovakia in case we were intelligence targets. That felt embarrassing, but I did it of course, and checked in about my meeting with Czech doctors in Kasserine who were doing surgery on people whose stomachs were exploding from eating too much cactus fruit during drought. I would meet up with Peace Corps volunteers. I just remember it all being very exciting. Learning, writing.

Q: You have this portfolio. How did you go about it? Did you go out and stop off at a tent or a house or something and say, "Anybody here wanna talk?" What would you do?

BERG: We had our staff, we had our wonderful local nationals who set official appointments for us, but I did a lot of just walking around and talking to people. I loved doing that. I had done a little bit of journalism. It was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it so much; it was like telling a story. But the more I got into it, it wasn't a very nice story and I just started to wake up. I think when I was first writing it was like I was writing some kind of novel, describing everything, but then I started attending events that were upsetting to me – hunger strikes, the very beginnings of the whole Islamic movement in which the region has been consumed. I was there in the early days of it. Fake trials.

Q: Ambassador Pelletreau has high marks in the Foreign Service. How did he appear to you?

BERG: He was a wonderful ambassador, a wonderful man – thoughtful, insightful, experienced and kind, the *crème de la crème*. Arabists back in the day had a deep affection for the Arab world and its people, and still do today. And maybe when you think the best of someone, you also get better cooperation toward foreign policy goals so there is a realpolitik element. But it only works to a certain point.

Q: The PLO had been moved from Lebanon to Tunisia as a safe haven. Did they enter the picture at all?

BERG: Yes. While I was there the United States opened its dialogue with the PLO. My boss, Edmund Hull and Ambassador Pelletreau engineered that dialogue and the discussions started.

Q: Yes, prior to that we were under strict instructions – don't talk to the PLO. Ridiculous, but that was Congress.

BERG: Yes, then we were talking. I was there through that, through the start of the talks, then the end of my tour was the first Gulf War and the post was evacuated. We were evacuated out.

Q: Did you get involved at all with the PLO?

BERG: No. I went over a couple of times with Edmund Hull, but I wasn't the officer who was really following that. He was the right person to start the dialogue; he knew the situation well and had served widely in the region. He clearly was a person interlocutors could talk to and trust. He had such a close regional connection. I believe doors opened for him to make good connections on behalf of the U.S.

Q: You said you were getting good feedback. Did you get that we had over-focused on Israel or not there?

BERG: My focus was internal politics. People in Tunisia largely sympathized with the Palestinian cause, and they felt vulnerable to Israel's military and intelligence. Frustration with the U.S. was really sparked by the Gulf War. Tunisia does have a Jewish population to this day. It has been more hospitable to its historic deeply rooted Jewish population than some of the other countries in the region and Bourguiba was part of that, I think. But sentiment was starting to turn, I would have to say, with the Gulf War. There were movements sweeping the whole region.

Q: Was it Tunisia where the museum was blown up?

BERG: That was 2002, the explosion in Djerba at a synagogue, after I served. And the Bardo Museum attack was in 2015.

Q: There was no Israeli raid on...?

BERG: There was an Israeli raid on the PLO in 1985. Yes, it was complicated, geopolitically complicated, and the internal politics unpleasant.

Q: Were there tribal entities in Tunisia that were politically important?

BERG: Bourguiba worked very hard on overcoming tribal identities and creating a national spirit and national unity. I don't know. These days I'm hearing that it's a little more fragmented, but at the time the identities were more around which city you're from; if you're from Sousse you're good at business, and if you're from... It was more around your city. Then there was a smallish Berber population compared to other countries in the region that have larger Berber populations. There's the Turkish influence – Tunisia was in the Ottoman Empire. So, French influence, wider Europe, Turkish influence, some Arab influence from the Gulf, interaction with sub-Saharan Africa... Quite a mix, but I don't think of Tunisians particularly as being tribally oriented.

Q: I was looking at the map of Tunisia, Tunisia is pretty well sealed off the rest of Africa.

BERG: By the desert? It was on some trading routes north including the slave trade through its southern oases. Today people are trying to transit Tunisia into Europe. I was there when Algeria had gone through a difficult and bloody situation with its Islamic party. Libya was dysfunctional. Tunisians have a bit of a superiority complex about Libya, making jokes about Libyans and Qaddafi. So, their neighborhood isn't easy, and Tunisia is small. There was a contingent that was looking towards the Gulf; there were some young people who were very inspired by the Iranian revolution and wanted to bring an Islamic kind of scene to Tunis. Of course, it's a Mediterranean nation and it has religious threads that go well into prehistory that you can still see, so the practice of religion in Tunisia was synchronic and some women were following some practices that might have dated back to the ancient goddess of the region. On the cultural side and the religious practice side, it was a beautiful place with synchronism and history and all kinds of wonderful strands and customs. But as far as I understand, this is being worn down by a very reductionist interpretation of Islam coming at them from farther East.

Q: America has a history there. You mentioned Kasserine; the Kasserine Pass was a major defeat, the first real bloody nose that American forces in that part of the world got.

BERG: Yes, we had World War history there, and we had history with their pirates, there used to be pirates disrupting trade, the corsairs.

Q: Yes, the Barbary wars.

BERG: Young people were facing identity issues. At the time I was there they had been teaching in French, but they were starting to teach in Arabic. Some young people weren't masters of either language. They were floating.

Q: Were you able to develop contacts at the university with students?

BERG: Yes. I was young and I made friends with young people at the time and I actually used to go and sit down with Montcef Marzouki, Tunisia's president 2011-2014.

We used to sit down together because he was a medical doctor who was a human rights activist. I would go to him and hear all these horrible things that were happening.

Q: Was anybody at the embassy saying, well, we're trying to develop good relations with Tunisia, don't overplay these human rights things?

BERG: No. The Tunisian government wrote a complaint about me and my human rights report and Ambassador Pelletreau went in and stood up for me. He turned out to be a great ambassador, a man of integrity.

Q: Did the Arab world intrigue you enough to want to get involved?

BERG: Yes, it did. I planned to keep working in the region and deepened my knowledge of the language. In my late twenties at the time, I met and married a Tunisian and Ambassador Pelletreau came to my wedding in Carthage at the city hall. Shortly after, we all evacuated. We had the Gulf War; everybody left.

Q: Which Gulf War was this?

BERG: The first Gulf War.

Q: This was the one to liberate Kuwait?

BERG: Yes. The Peace Corps was pulled out, everyone. The public was very upset with the U.S. bombing Iraq. I'm not sure how dire it was, but we all left.

Q: How long had you been in Tunisia when...?

BERG: Three years, a two-year tour of duty followed by study at the Arabic Language field school in Tunis. I did my political tour. I was supposed to go to Egypt with Ambassador Pelletreau, in the political section.

Q: How did you find learning Arabic?

BERG: I loved learning Arabic. I learned it first with a Peace Corps instructor. He just taught me how to speak, so I learned how to speak a dialect before I started to deal with the writing system and the standard Arabic and the grammar. So, I was already comfortable speaking Arabic when I started to learn written Arabic. Written Arabic is more difficult.

Q: By that time, once you learned Arabic, you were really on the path to be a specialist in the area. Where did the Tunisian dialect fit in the Arabic spectrum?

BERG: It has a little bit of this and that in it – a little bit of Turkish, a little bit of French, and a little bit of Berber maybe. It's kind of chummy... Syrian is so elegant; I wouldn't say that about Tunisian Arabic. It's more casual.

Q: Was Egypt much of an influence in the area?

BERG: Egypt was because it was before the Internet, it was before all those TV stations, it was before Al-Jazeera, it was before pan-Arab television. We had Tunisian television. Tunisians got RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana, Italy's national public broadcasting company) they would get the Italian stations, the French stations, and then they had their own stations. On their stations they played Egyptian movies, everything Egyptian because Egypt was big and had a strong cultural workforce exporting song, film and theater across the region. The media world, the book publishing world, all those influences were from Egypt. So, if you were going to get involved in Arabic, you got involved in Egyptian culture. Egypt was a very powerful cultural influence – Egyptian singers, Egyptian movie stars. There was some, but not a lot of local production.

Q: You got married while you were there. What's the background of your husband?

BERG: I got married in Tunisia, and we are still married. Ben Ali legalized the Ennahda Party (a moderate Islamist party founded in 1981 as “The Movement of Islamist Tendency”), which is the party that at the time of this interview had won the elections in Tunisia. Ben Ali legalized this party and my husband was in the youth wing of the party. When they became legal a student delegation came to the embassy.

My husband was in the student delegation from the university that came to introduce their newly legalized movement to us. They went to the French, the British, and the Americans to introduce themselves. Karim educated me about the Islamic student movement. Over time I realized that he actually was not interested in being in an Islamic student movement; he just didn't support the single party system. He was an artist and a writer and had other aspirations. We fell in love because we both enjoyed literature. I told him that I had been a poet and he told me he was a storyteller, and we fell in love.

It was a long process. He got to know everybody at the embassy and finally won people over. The ambassador came to our wedding and stood by us, but by the time we did get married Ben Ali had changed his mind about legalizing the movement and changed his mind about student activity and was surrounding the campuses with tanks and things were getting complicated. My husband and I would have left the region even if there hadn't been an evacuation, but the war happened at the same time. So we headed out; in the war, in the crackdown, we departed.

Q: Where did you go?

BERG: We went back to Washington. I actually had decided not to go to Egypt. I felt that my husband had never lived in the West and I wanted him to learn about the U.S. before we would try to be a diplomatic couple together. So we came home and I was on the East Africa desk (U.S. State Department Office of East African Affairs, in the Bureau of African Affairs) for Tanzania, Kenya, Mauritius, the Comoros Islands, Madagascar. Those were my countries.

Q: Those are busy countries. How long were you doing that, from when to when?

BERG: I must have been two years on the desk. I left for the Gulf War in '91, so that would put me on the desk until '93.

Q: Let's take Kenya to begin with. What were our interests there?

BERG: Well, the country that was giving us the most heartburn during my tenure on the desk was actually Madagascar, which had a dictator named Ratsiraka (Didier Ratsiraka) and we had an ambassador there who was very friendly with him. They would have long conversations. There was a revolution happening, but we weren't really picking up on it. We weren't exactly picking up on it.

Q: So, what did you do?

BERG: The Office of East African Affairs decided to evacuate the mission, but the mission didn't want to be evacuated, so that was a difficult moment for me on the desk. They didn't want to come home. The ambassador didn't feel like there was a revolution or danger to his staff. So, there was a difference of opinion between Washington and the post, and there was a difference of opinion among people at the post. That was a case where the top leadership had a very close relationship with the president – too close. Ratsiraka was removed from power – but he did regain power some years later, so maybe the case wasn't so clear cut.

Q: Was it apparent to you and others that this relationship was a little too much "localitis" (i.e., too heavily influenced by the local government leadership)?

BERG: Yes. That's the one time I think I really felt that from leadership of the mission. I don't think it has been an issue otherwise in my tenure. We were obviously behaving that way when I was in Saudi (Arabia), but it wasn't from a lack of awareness, it was actually a political decision.

Q: There are two things. Sometimes it's for policy reasons and other times it's personal.

BERG: Yes, he had gone a little too deep in a country where we didn't really have important interests.

Q: Did we have any particular interests in Madagascar at the time? At one point we had listening stations for satellite stuff and all.

BERG: We were conducting aid related projects, maintaining good relations, and had some military training going on. I also had responsibility for our embassy in the Comoros Islands, which we closed in 1993. I remember the residence, its empty swimming pool and these enormous bats that hung upside down in the trees around the pool. We closed our embassy down during that wave of cost saving closures of less vital missions, and

consolidated interests into the embassy in Madagascar, which I think was reasonable, as much as it might be nice to have a presence in every country.

Q: The Comoros too had had a series of attempted takeovers by mercenaries.

BERG: Yes, but they are really in the French circle of influence more than ours.

Q: But you didn't have to deal with that at the time.

BERG: No. For us I would have said that our representation on the mainland in Kenya and Tanzania was more critical.

Q: Tanzania. There had been a period of fascination there because of the leader, Nyerere (Julius Nyerere). Was that still going on?

BERG: Ali Hassan Mwinyi would have been president then, starting to reverse some socialist policies and move to a multiparty system. I visited Zanzibar where, if I remember right, a political trial was taking place.

Q: Zanzibar has always been much more Arabic and Tanzania has been more African.

BERG: We must have had the beginnings of the difficulties that we have there now. The terrorist attack on the embassy in Kenya was not so many years later. I think all of that was starting to boil. The tensions were in place.

I had Mauritius in my portfolio, a wonderful, multicultural island country and they're very active in Washington, lobbying for their sugar interests. They are smart, politically very astute. They would take my time because they were always around lobbying, entertaining and standing up for themselves and making sure they had good relations. They were so small; the only way to have good relations was really to work hard on the personal things. They were up on the Hill (Capitol Hill, U.S. Congress), they were striving and trying to make everything work for their sugar market.

Q: That's one of the things that foreign embassies do in the United States. The great majority don't really understand the system. They think that dealing with the State Department is important. It's kind of, but mainly it's Congress that's far more important.

BERG: Yes, and this team was very savvy, politically strong and smart. I enjoyed interacting with them. I had five U.S. ambassadors and five ambassadors from these countries and everybody was always calling, but they were calling with little things. Our ambassador in the Comoros wanted to get some hospital beds the military was getting rid of and he wanted to get them over to the Comoros, and how were we going to do it, and we did it. The Mauritians wanted to talk about their sugar and Madagascar was having its revolution. Everybody had their own concerns. It was enjoyable to be on the desk.

Q: It was kind of fun for you.

BERG: It was. It was a great portfolio, a fun portfolio, lots of action and stories.

Q: How about Kenya? Who was the leader there? His name escapes me now, but he was a difficult person.

BERG: Yes, Kenya was somewhat authoritarian under Daniel arap Moi. There was a lot of crime. The other problem in Kenya and Tanzania, the embassy families were experiencing a lot of crime. In Tanzania robbers were coming down through the roofs, cutting through the ceilings and coming into the houses. People were having a lot of physical problems just being dispatched. There were security issues that were not related to politics. High risk posts for robbery and that kind of personal security, family safety issues. That was hard for people serving in Tanzania especially. Do you hear about that? Do people talk about that?

Q: Oh yes. Some of the places are just extremely difficult. Papua, New Guinea is one of the worst. There you've got basically stone aged people coming out of the mountains of Papua, New Guinea into Port Moresby. They see a car and they'll try to take it. It's kind of what you do back in the mountains. It's really incredible.

How did you find working in the African Bureau?

BERG: I loved it. You know who else I remember now is McCormick Spice Company. I had Madagascar in my portfolio and McCormick would come around because they had their vanilla beans coming from Madagascar when this whole thing was happening. There was a lot of back and forth.

Q: Madagascar is really a sort of terra incognita for so many people.

BERG: That was an old relationship, that relationship between McCormick and its Madagascar interests.

Q: Cinnamon there?

BERG: Well, mostly I remember vanilla, but probably cinnamon. Then there were wildlife preservation issues, deforestation issues, all the things in the AID (U.S. Agency for International Development) portfolios. Not Mauritius though... Mauritius wasn't a country in need of aid. The appointee ambassador there wanted to buy a piano for the residence, and that caused some consternation. We weren't managing major issues there.

Q: Did you travel much to these places?

BERG: Only once during my period on the desk.

Q: What were you doing about your Arabic?

BERG: Nothing, just speaking it.

Q: But, of course, with a husband...

BERG: Yes, I maintained my Arabic, so when we were finally ready to go out into the field we went to Morocco, with me pregnant. Our son was born in Morocco, and we adopted our oldest daughter there. I didn't take much time off. The first few weeks, my son came to work in a basket, and then we set up our household with a nanny. I think in my career, I took very little time off. I worked a lot. In Morocco, I worked in the cultural affairs section for Louise Taylor, a fine CAO.

Q: You came in as a USIA?

BERG: I came in as a political officer and I switched over to USIA. Morocco was an excursion tour for me. I went on an excursion as a cultural affairs officer and I stayed in Morocco for four years.

Q: You were in Morocco from when to when?

BERG: '92 to '96.

Q: What was happening in Morocco then? What was the situation in Morocco when you arrived in '92?

BERG: Morocco was on the brink of getting the Internet, just on the brink of the Internet revolution. So, one of the things I really remember was the Internet coming to Morocco.

Q: This has had such an influence all over, including the United States.

BERG: It changed everything.

Q: Were you aware of the change that was happening and were the Moroccans aware of the change that was happening?

BERG: I really remember I had a wonderful experience in Morocco. I loved serving there and I stayed there a long time, but I was involved there in culture, in libraries, in books, and trying to get information to people. I started an association called the Board of English Language Librarians for everybody who had a library that had an English component to it nationwide.

Then, at some point in this process I realized that everything was about to change and we started to meet with young people who were technical wizards and we're going to be involved in the Internet revolution. We formed another civic society organization that was the Internet – it was the Moroccan branch of the Internet Society. These two things were going parallel; doing the old USIA thing of trying to make sure there were books for everybody when it became really clear the things were just about to... A revolution, a real revolution was taking place. A real one, a wonderful amazing revolution was about

to take place. The young people were plugged in. Sometimes I think of the career and think of it as a long journey through technologies which I'm still involved in today.

Q: Were you able to set up Internet connections in our libraries at all?

BERG: It was also a period where USIA was about to be... I was there from '92 to '96. When did USIA get...? (Referring to the date when much of USIA's functions were folded into the State Department and USIA was abolished, which was finally accomplished in 1999.)

Q: Toward the end of that.

BERG: Toward the end of that period. There was this big question about whether investing in libraries and connecting to the young people was even something that our missions were supposed to be doing. So, on the one hand, you were trying as hard as you could to do youth outreach, and to speak with young people and to win friends in the Arab world among a new generation. Washington was ambivalent. That was part of the story of that time period, but we people on the ground... And they closed the Marrakesh mission at that time, so I guess I was around at a period when missions were getting closed, first when I was on the desk, and then in Morocco. The Department of State closed Consulate Marrakesh, a very active representation.

There was a lot of cost saving and belt tightening going on in the State Department. At the same time, we know now, that losing a generation in the Arab world was a really bad idea. So people were put out there without very many resources to do a really big and important job where there was a lack of political commitment in the United States to the job being done at all. So, I think it was complicated. I think it was complicated, but it was great work.

Q: CNN (Cable News Network) came to the fore in the Gulf War. Had it become a standard source of information, particularly about the United States in Morocco?

BERG: No, I don't think so. Not so many Moroccans were Anglophone. I'm just trying to remember when those pan-Arab stations started broadcasting.

Q: Al-Jazeera...

BERG: Yes. One of the biggest shifts for the region was the pan-Arab media. There used to be newspapers and so on, but the pan-Arab television stations, that was a huge change, and it was the moment when the influence from the Gulf really started to get projected all over the region. Big changes were underway.

Also, I think, demographically, Morocco, for whatever reason, didn't do much for family planning. Tunisia, Bourguiba, somehow, he also was for small families and Tunisians weren't having big families at that time. They were already a little more middle class. But Morocco had some of the issues that Syria has where it got so populated so fast,

really big families. To this day... I think the last time I visited there a couple of years ago they were starting to be serious about family size. It's very late because they have a youth bulge in Morocco. But when you know a place has a youth bulge that's the time you think about reaching out to youth, and that was the time when the ambivalence was kicking in in Washington, about budgets.

I remember us being a small team with a large audience and needing to think very strategically about how to reach people. At the time I had this idea to form civil society organizations and I kept using that model as I went around to my different positions. It worked, so I think it was a constructive thing to do.

Q: OK, in Morocco, in the first place, what was your impression of the support for the king?

BERG: In Morocco people really supported their king, tied in part to religion.

Q: He's a descendant, isn't he, of the prophet?

BERG: Yes, he can get away with a lot. It was the old king when I was there and he WAS getting away with a lot, his family, outrageously. The people were poor. When he would go on those visits to different cities, the cities would have to give a gift, and it was inevitably something huge and enormous. He would take people's houses and do all kinds of nonsense, but, of all the places I've been, people really supported the monarchy. They haven't had a revolution. Even now with this younger king, I still hear the same things – "he's trying, he's changing things, he's making it better for us..."

Q: Was the war over; the Polisario (Polisario Front, a rebel national liberation movement in the Western Sahara) movement and all, was that going on at the time?

BERG: The Polisario issue, the border is still closed with Algeria. You can't travel from South Africa to Morocco because South Africa is on the wrong side of the Polisario issue. They hobble themselves with this frozen conflict, as far as I'm concerned. Then they try other models, or their Atlantic connection because they have closed themselves off from parts of Africa. That's not practical at all. In my view, it is time to resolve the conflict.

Q: I know. I've talked to people who've tried to at least deal with the prisoners who are in Algeria. The Moroccans show no real interest in that.

BERG: Why would you cut yourself off from the market like that and leave everything to smugglers, and why would you close such a significant border when really it could be resolved? I don't understand. It's like Greece and Macedonia, stubbornness; they're just dug in.

Q: I can't think of one right now, but I'm sure we've gotten ourselves into...

BERG: Frozen conflicts? I think it would be so positive for Morocco if they could get past that, practice their conflict resolution and have a good neighborly relationship with Algeria.

Q: How did you find getting out and dealing with Moroccans in your work?

BERG: People were easily accessible, open and quite friendly. They have big families and are very family oriented. I find people mostly interested in making sure things are OK for their families. So, wanting to know how to get visas and how to get jobs, and if you could do a favor, and what they could ask for that might help out the family. That makes sense. People were striving.

Q: With these big families were there problems finding jobs?

BERG: Yes. At that time, a major concern was figuring out avenues for youth.

Q: Did we, as a government, embassy and all, see any solution about helping educate the younger generation to become a technological generation or what have you, or were we essentially just sitting back and watching it develop?

BERG: It wasn't considered our most critical relationship, more in the sphere of France. None of the countries we've discussed so far were front and center to U.S. interests except, I would say, there was the Tunisia-PLO-Israel concern. Morocco was the first country to have diplomatic relations with the United States. It is a country that has been a strong, consistent ally of the United States. They deserve our attention.

Morocco has a large diaspora population across Europe and a growing diaspora population in the United States. Moroccans are great connectors, very good at languages and global connectivity, and at positioning their country to be both a Mediterranean and an Atlantic country. I think they are moving in some smart directions.

Of course, they do have the problem of people going to the Islamic State; they do have a problem of connectivity to terrorism – some of the people in Belgium, and the Belgium incident. Tunisia is the number one exporter, but Morocco also has work to do. The intelligence relationship is important. It's a country that I feel we could pay more attention to than we do. I would reemphasize that closing posts in the Arab World such as consulate Marrakesh was not a forward-looking decision.

Q: Are we doing anything about... Usually family size, often the key to that is women. Working there, did we have anything to reach out to women saying, "Why didn't you become an executive, rather than a..."

BERG: Peace Corps is active there. We had a beautiful Fulbright Program there. As said, the last time I visited, which was for the German Marshall Fund (the German Marshall Fund of the United States is a nonpartisan American public policy think tank and grant-making institution dedicated to promoting cooperation and understanding between

North America and Europe) I found that there is a sea change in terms of women's empowerment. Hassan II didn't really seem to want people to be educated.

Q: The demographics of a lot of countries are really under threat along with people living longer. Hell, I'm 88; I'm screwing up things for younger people. The system isn't designed to have 88-year-old guys continuing...

BERG: We aren't really serving as a model for generational transfer of power here in the United States! But you conducting interviews about diplomatic history? Seems ok to me.

Q: I won't feel overly guilty. Were they open to you? Did you find...?

BERG: Yes, Moroccans are so open. The complication there at the time was that people had a lot of needs. Relationships were very transactional. But people are so warm, so loving. I gave birth there to my son and I cannot imagine a better place to be a new mom working at the embassy because they're so family oriented. I would get there and every single person from out in the parking lot all the way in would want to know how the baby was. There is a strong focus on family. So, I was swimming in an environment where having a family was the thing to do. It was a good place for me to be at that time. On a personal front, we hired a nanny in Morocco who traveled with us, and ended up marrying in the U.S. I have close personal ties to Morocco. The Foreign Service doesn't insulate us from life. We live and mature as we move, and these countries become integral parts of our personal histories.

Q: What was your husband doing?

BERG: My husband was working for a USAID contractor that was involved in family planning.

Q: We've got our own problem with family planning – it's quite an issue with Congress. It's sort of "just say no" or the equivalent.

BERG: Yes. That wasn't the case at the time.

Q: All of us have screwed up priorities.

BERG: Yes. I don't know that I think the U.S. should be walking around telling people to control their family size, but I did think at the time that the Moroccan government should look at its demographic projection and think through what makes sense and what would make for a livable, sustainable and balanced country. I fear that their resources aren't going to be sufficient for the population they're going to have.

Moroccans have a beautiful old culture, arts and music, dance, their love of language and storytelling. They are very good business people, they are great with languages. They have so many strengths and it's quite a diverse country. It's a wonderful country, really.

Q: How did our embassy fit into this as far as influence and getting along, and with the things that we wanted?

BERG: I think we had a very close relationship with the Moroccans. Sorry to hear Trump and his rhetoric about Muslims (U.S. candidate for President, Donald Trump) lately. Even Morocco, how did it come into his mind? They are really good partners to us. They are very solid, dependable partners to the United States. In the region we are fortunate to have our friendship with Morocco.

Q: We are speaking now in 2016, in August. We're in the middle of an election where we have basically an impossible candidate for the Republicans, Donald Trump, who's talking about excluding Muslims from immigration to the United States. Hopefully, this will be a disaster for the Republicans. Maybe they'll get it back on the right track, but we're going through a difficult period here. How did you find the embassy?

BERG: USIA was separate in Morocco. We had our own building for our team and we had a library, a cultural center. I was running the cultural center. We had a lending library that we automated; we had cultural events all year; we had a bevy of Fulbright scholars, and we had relationships with universities across the country. So, it was more on the cultural and academics exchange side that I worked in Morocco. I think our outreach was effective.

Morocco opened the Ifrane university (Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane), their first English language university and were drawing a lot from U.S. education models and they were very curious about it, open minded. That university was and is an interesting place that we were engaged with. We have our historic legation in Tangier for cultural programming, and the Consulate in Casablanca. We really moved around the country offering speaker programs and other cultural and education exchanges.

Q: Let's talk about some of these programs. How was the center run? What was the emphasis of the center would you say?

BERG: English language teaching, access to written materials, speaker programs to reach young audiences, professional exchange, and academic exchange.

Q: I would imagine you wouldn't have any trouble getting people to come there.

BERG: No, it was a really open, friendly place at a good time.

Q: Beautiful place, good food, good music, and an intelligent audience.

BERG: The cultural center provided a great service, soft diplomacy, and then Washington closed it, needless to say, a couple of years later, closed the library, shut everything down, because the Congress at the time wasn't supportive of soft diplomacy in the Arab World. So, our most effective connection to youth audiences just closed.

Why would we have done that? It was such a miscalculation; the library and cultural center were not costly in terms of a foreign policy, and yet so influential.

Q: Were the French doing anything?

BERG: Yes, my goodness! The French had extensive cultural activities. Morocco is so close to France, of course. That relationship is in the blood. Those partners may be fractious from time to time, but they are also extremely close.

Q: Also, you mentioned that none of us forget that Morocco was the first country to recognize the United States.

BERG: Yes, and we had a military base in Kenitra for some decades, maybe the 40s through the 70s.

Q: It was also the base for the B-47s. It was during the Cold War. It was considered a fall back base. In case the Soviets overran Europe we were ready to use it, we built bases there. Different world.

BERG: They are true allies of the United States. We should continue to invest in maintaining this relationship.

Q: Did you see any African influence?

BERG: Yes, more than in Tunisia because the southern part of Morocco stretches down into Africa, deeper into Africa. Historically, there were trade routes from Timbuktu that went up through Morocco. You definitely feel the influence and cultural connections. However, there is also some racism. All across North Africa, there is some just plain racism. Beyond that, there are strong family connections, trading routes, and old relationships. Morocco maintains significant ties with West Africa.

Q: What about the, I don't know if it's called the Rif area (Rif or Riff mountains)? There are mountain people, aren't there?

BERG: Yes, they are the mountain people. The region is a source of migration due to marginalized conditions. A lot of the ties with Belgium and France are through people of the Rif. The Rif had a rebellion in 1958 and Hassan II put the rebellion down violently, resulting in thousands of deaths.

Q: Did we have anything in that area cultural-wise?

BERG: We would go up and do some programming. They were marijuana producing, or kif (also kief or keef, in Morocco a mix of finely chopped marijuana and tobacco) producing region. They were a rebellious region. They are the region with the closest family ties to European populations. I understand this is being corrected, investment is coming to the region and things are getting better. Marrakesh opens up to sub-Saharan

Africa. Then the Rif region is Europe facing. But I question my own memories, as this was long ago. Transportation and communication are so different now, it is easier to connect and to build.

The current king has built a very modern trans-shipping port in the North. Then there are the big cities – Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, Marrakesh, urban populations and a considerable presence of French retirees. People are actually going and settling there just like Americans go to Mexico to live well on a pension.

Q: Was there a significant Jewish population?

BERG: There is a Jewish population in Morocco, perhaps 5,000 or so people. Many left for Israel, with peak emigration in the 60s when some 250,000 departed largely for Israel. Clearly the community did not see its future in independent Morocco. When I lived there, the government made efforts to be protective of the Jewish population.

Q: This goes way back?

BERG: Yes.

Q: I did some work on consular activities during the 19th century and the Jews have always been a sort of protected group.

BERG: Yes, in Tunisia and Morocco. In Tunisia I remember having to report on attacks against individual Jewish people and always trying to figure out, was it just a plain robbery or was there some different angle to it? They were a fragile, vulnerable, older population in the capital, maybe a more robust community still on the island of Djerba.

Q: Did you see the beginning of radical Islam when you were there, outbreaks of Islamist?

BERG: I was more aware of that in Tunisia, even though I served in Morocco more recently. That is because I covered politics in Tunisia, and conducted cultural programming in Morocco.

Q: Is that a spillover from Algeria?

BERG: Yes, when I was covering the Islamic movement, I tried to figure out what all those different threads were. But I do know it was an issue in Morocco. There was an attack on a hotel, right? I just don't remember what year it was. I more remember the political difficulties in Morocco. Of course there was the Islamic movement, and of course it was a political issue at that time. I wasn't as connected to it as I was in Tunis. It was percolating and is ongoing, though governments around the Mediterranean and in Northern Europe are much more knowledgeable now about how to manage this.

It's counterintuitive since Iran is Shia, and the Sunnis have their issues with the Shia; nevertheless, the Iranian revolution impressed young people across the region as a way of reclaiming power and identity. It goes back quite a long way, and then on top of it was all this propaganda from the Gulf, and then the Egyptian Muslim brothers. A lot of crosscurrents, but I think of Morocco as quite resilient. It probably isn't, but I think of it that way because of their unique syncretic culture and their affection for a monarchy.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop, but where did you go from there?

BERG: To Saudi (Arabia).

Q: OK! So we'll talk about -- this will be 1996 -- you're going to Saudi Arabia.

Q: Today is August 17, 2016. You're leaving Tunisia and you're off to Saudi.

BERG: I'm leaving Tunisia and then I'm off to the United States, to the Desk (a country or regional affairs office), then from the Desk to Morocco, and heading to Saudi from Morocco now.

Q: That's right, that's right, you're leaving Morocco.

BERG: I leave Morocco now with a big entourage, husband, two kids, two nannies and a pet, heading over to Jeddah.

Q: Did you get any time in Washington for training or anything?

BERG: No, I think I might have just gone over because at the time I had this big family unit and I just needed to get us settled in. We were in Morocco for four years. I studied Arabic the last year in Fez.

Q: You're in Saudi Arabia from when to when?

BERG: So, I'm in Saudi Arabia from '96 to 2001.

Q: What was your job?

BERG: I was the public affairs officer at the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah for four years, then the Cultural Attaché in Riyadh for two years.

Q: There's sort of a 50 year gap between when I was there. I was there from '58 to '60, but I was there in Dhahran. There's probably been a couple of tectonic plate shifts or something in that period anyway. When you arrived in '96 how would you describe the situation in Saudi Arabia?

BERG: I was there for the swan song of the happy times, I think. I was there with Steve Buck, who was the Consul General. You know Steve, of course. He's a wonderful Arabist (please note, Steve has passed in 2023, to our great sadness.) His heart was completely open to the Arab world; he was really respected and loved. He cared a lot for people in the region and this was reciprocated. Unfortunately, he was about the time of the Al-Khobar bombing, and later we were confronted with the Nairobi Embassy bombing. One of our staff members was over in Nairobi on a TDY (temporary duty assignment) and came back to us with wounds from broken glass and with vision problems. This changing environment meant that we couldn't be open as we had been in Jeddah, security needed to be stepped up. Prior, the Consulate had been a relaxed place where we could offer excellent hospitality and maintain positive relations with Jeddah's leadership. Saudis could just come and feel relaxed, especially the large contingent of American-educated Saudis. It was like a home away from home for people.

Then, we needed to intensify security, which, I think, was hard, adjusting the mentality to think that you are in a dangerous environment when you HAD been in an environment that was known to be hospitable and warm for families, a welcoming place. It was a difficult adjustment, a generational adjustment for the old school to this new situation.

Q: Let's talk about the time before things had to get cracked down and all. You say that a lot of the Saudis, that these are people maybe who had been educated in the United States?

BERG: Yes, a lot of the contacts of the consulate, businesspeople, newspapers editors, political leadership. You know, it was an interesting time too because Saudi Arabia took a decision to have private universities. Their population was growing really fast. I think we discussed that last time I was here. They needed to expand education and also there was some ambivalence about sending so many students over to the U.S., so there was a shift going on. One of the decisions they took was to have private colleges and that was exciting for me in the public affairs world. I was able to help with connections for the founding of the first women's private college in Jeddah; I was able to bring the Texas International Education Consortium to help with the development of the college. It was exciting.

There were a lot of really interesting things happening at the time. There was just no way around it – the ground was being laid for al-Qaida, the violence that ensued, and attacks continued to take place such as the USS Cole bombing in 2000. On the one hand, we were moving forward with programming, and on the other, pressure and terrorism were building up.

Q: You got there, at the beginning of universities with ties to the United States and all. Did you find yourself concentrating on the role of women there?

BERG: Yes, I did a lot of work. As in Morocco, I helped found some civil society organizations. We supported a Saudi effort to found the Arabian Society for Human Resource Management. We started an English teachers association. Some of the civil

society work allowed us to be working across the gender divide in Saudi, which, of course, was not welcomed by the Saudi government. The MFA complained about this work and sent a note to the embassy up in Riyadh about the work that was going on in Jeddah.

It was a situation where, on the one hand, the mission was telling me to go out and strengthen civil society and work on women's empowerment and, on the other hand, the U.S. had obviously totally bought into the Saudi power structure, so the embassy itself was not coherent or transparent about what it really wanted to have happening. I think for the Saudis who were interested, constantly when we would host those dinners for Washington visitors they would be very straight forward – you people talk about human rights, you talk about democracy, but here in Saudi Arabia you are leaving us abandoned and strung out here with a monarchy and religious establishment that doesn't allow for freedom; why are you saying one thing and doing this other thing, where do you really stand?

The frustration was very palpable. But my job was somehow to demonstrate that we really stood by our values. It was madness and I suppose it still is. Really the hypocrisy of our approach could be seen as seeding some of the disasters that followed. It was dishonesty or, if we want to be charitable, a lack of clarity, a double agenda. It was so sad, really. I loved being able to do the work that I was able to do. I loved having the resources and the support of some parts of the U.S. Government to do the work that I was able to do that felt meaningful. Working with Saudi women leaders in the different sectors on their advancement felt very meaningful.

Q: Obviously you were getting far more than a sample of the women in Saudi Arabia. You were getting a full dose of what their role was. At that time what was the role of women?

BERG: There were a lot of professional women, and the education level was impressive. Serious money was being invested in education. There were so many people with PhDs who were far more educated than I am. There were amazing Saudi young people who had a lot of brain power, nuanced and interesting thinkers, who had accumulated all these degrees, who were running these major huge companies and industries. There was a lot of power there.

Women were working as journalists, they were working as doctors, they had their own section at the chamber of commerce. Safeya bin Zager who was the first Saudi woman visual artist hosted a salon where all of these intellectual women would go. The women were a lot of fun to be with, very smart, very educated, from these merchant families of Jeddah. Traditionally Jeddah had been quite an open place, before Saudi rule. It was a place where people came from all over the world on a pilgrimage and they would stay. A lot of residents of Jeddah had their roots in other regions. They became Saudi citizens, but they had roots in the “-stans” (Central Asian countries with names ending in “-stan”), they had roots from all across the Muslim world. It was exciting, a lot of diversity there.

Even Chinese Saudis who must have been Uyghurs. Then there was this long arm of Riyadh trying to stamp the color out of everything, institute thought control.

Q: Did you find, for example, individual Saudi women would come to you and sort of cry their hearts out, or whatever you want to say to talk about...?

BERG: No, I think they were realistic. There were some women who argued for the Saudi system. They really stood very strongly for the system, they bought into the system. There were other women who felt like change was going to come slowly and they just wanted to be part of it, but not push it. There were other women who were taking great personal risks to try to bring about change. There was the whole spectrum. But any time if you come as a Western woman and start being holier than thou, the answer is going to be, this is our system, and we don't need you telling us what to do. And that is true. So, I think the approach to dialogue needs to be to listen carefully, then share perspectives.

Q: Did you have women coming to seek refuge or shelter from abusive husbands?

BERG: No. I was working with women leaders, and that isn't a role people achieved without the support of the men in their lives.

Q: Was there talk about the future? Very obviously, this is not a system that can last.

BERG: Steve used to say, don't "get killed by kindness" because really they are such hospitable people and such generous people. You can get swept up. It's beautiful – you go to a Saudi family occasion and all the generations are there. The circle is so big, in just one family. It's kind of amazing, and has its enchantment. It was difficult, the positioning of the United States was very difficult. Of course, we like to do things fast, but it takes time to develop relationships. By the end people were only staying for a year. By the end it was just so superficial, and security was so intense -- difficult to develop relationships. People took friendship seriously in Saudi at the time that I lived there.

Q: Did you have any experiences one way or the other with like the women's college from Texas, getting them established? Was this a difficult task?

BERG: Well, it was interesting. The person in Saudi who was doing this work was Saleha Abedin, the mother of Huma Abedin, who became Hillary Clinton's close team member. Her mother, a scholar and education leader, founded the women's college in Jeddah all those years ago. She's from India. Like so many Jeddah families, they came from somewhere else.

Q: These are merchant families, essentially.

BERG: Yes. She was building this college, quite a sophisticated effort, and the college would serve the merchant families of Jeddah. I have a memory of an official visit to a boys' school in the south. going to a boys' school. They prepared a welcome for me and

all the boys came out, lined up and sang a song in English, “We love our school, we love our school...” They stood outside in the sun. I was so surprised!

The U.S. Geological Survey was working in the Hejaz Province, and we went to visit a uranium mining area. There was a Bedouin camp where they had a mine. We sat in a big circle with a campfire and had that white cardamom coffee poured from a big spout. I was an honorary man for the occasion. I was able to go on calls to all institutions as an honorary male and have these surprising experiences. They weren’t used to, obviously, having women show up. When I went to the Islamic Development Bank, I would think the men were just going to die and faint, die or perish in the elevator having to be with a woman in the elevator. Having to be with a woman in the elevator must have felt excruciating. People were so anxious when I went to these places. I would go to the Ministry of Education – no women. I would need to go over there for meetings. It caused a lot of anxiety for people, but I needed to do my work. In Saudi, a lot of times I was the first woman to cross a threshold. Sometimes it was stressful, most of the time actually I would try to go in the front door, and they threw me out, told me to use the back door in places, really being a second-class citizen and being told it was for my own good. My life has been pretty free of discrimination, but in Saudi I felt that first hand. Maybe I came out of the experience with a different level of empathy.

Q: Would there be a point where you would break off from being an honorary man and go to the back room where the ladies were?

BERG: To my Western mindset, it was just anxiety ridden. I have a memory of this unfortunate scholar. I went to her thesis defense and the men were on a remote camera so that she could see the men, but they couldn’t see her. This was decades before Zoom. So she was just a voice out there in the ether. At some point, she started to weep in this room and the men testing her couldn’t see that she was crying. I brought an English language specialist and put him in a room by himself with a microphone, while all the women teachers were in the classroom down the hall so he could teach them whatever it was that he was coming to share. Segregation is a struggle and sucks up mental energy.

Q: We had various people coming – cultural people, painters.... How did you work this?

BERG: We had a big art exhibit arrive and the religious police came to make sure it was OK. There was one painting that was divided into four sections and this gentleman kept looking at it and was very perplexed. Finally, he said, “Isn’t that a cross?” To divide the canvas into quadrants the artist of course needed to make a cross, so the censor wanted to take the picture out of the exhibition. We couldn’t bring musicians. We had to find workarounds, because basically everything was forbidden unless it was permitted.

Actually, Jeddah, in its own way, was really an enchanting place and existed at a subliminal level in a state of resistance. Jeddah, specifically, because of all those different cultures that were present and because of its port city openness, and because of some truly excellent local leaders and personalities. I have positive memories of Jeddah.

Q: Did you have to be careful about the speakers coming in?

BERG: Yes. For example we had a pianist come in, but basically under cover.

Q: Did you find that you had a guest speaker and you had to tell him what to say?

BERG: I had an NGO management specialist come in who took mini liquor bottles from the airplane and put them in his suitcase. I had to spend hours at the airport to deal with this visitor who was breaking the Saudi law by importing alcohol... Why would someone do that? It's not as if our welcome cable didn't clearly say, alcohol is not permitted in the Kingdom. We had to deal with silliness too from the Americans. Sometimes we would really have to get people out of pickles.

Q: Did you have problems with news?

BERG: The Internet didn't work well really because it went through a Saudi firewall. So the Internet was an issue. What I mull over the most when I think about Jeddah.... I was running a public affairs operation with a student advising center and I had a young Chinese-descent Singaporean who was the student counselor, and she was very frustrated with the stream of young Saudi men coming into the center. She would scold them. In addition, every week, she was approached by people who wanted to know about pilot training courses. You know what year this was. So, we finally decided to make a publication for them, a guidebook for them that we would have in the office so that they could learn about pilot training because so many young men were coming to ask about pilot training. I look back and think about how I was there in Jeddah when the visas must have been issued for the 9/11 attackers. Of course, Saudi Airlines was a big deal in Jeddah, powerful, and being a pilot really was a dream. However, Al Qaeda was growing, and Bin Laden was from Jeddah. I feel as I've felt in other places, that it is hard to see what we don't want to see, hard to see what is completely outside of our experiences.

Q: Pilot training was a big deal. Back in the 1950s we had a lot of people going to Tulsa. I was a visa officer.

BERG: It seemed like everybody wanted to be a pilot.

Q: I think it sounds easier, I don't know. It was a major interest back in the 1950s, way before any 9/11 type thing. The seed had well sprouted about interest in flying.

BERG: We were in a trailer. This is the other thing. Talk about the security at that time, my outfit was in a trailer. We weren't in a hardened building or anything like that. We were the public affairs arm, so we had these young men coming in to ask about pilot training and this young woman scolding them. Then we had all of our beautiful civil society programs which was the one thing I did there that I really felt made a difference for the long term, to be able to bring together and form these non-profit professional organizations and allow people access to all of this excitement around professional development. I think it was uplifting. For me it was like a badge of personal power and

agency for people to be able to engage in those meetings and growth opportunities. But really, all around us, tension was building up, to culminate in the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

Q: Before we get to that, how did you find living there, I mean you, and your husband and kids?

BERG: Well, when we first got there, we were in a house that didn't have enough set-back (distance from the street as a security precaution). Security regulations changed and we needed to be moved and we were moved into a compound that a Saudi man had built for his four children – one of these palaces, these big houses. There was a groundskeeper, we had this 24-hour motor pool because women couldn't drive. At any moment, you could call and get a vehicle. There were four families living there and all the kids would play together. Two were embassy families and two were not. Nannies, groundskeeper, drivers. For a mom with a growing family, this was helpful. I could concentrate on my work.

Just like a Saudi family, we were living with wealth in a certain way, something we would never experience in our own lives at home. But, at the same time, we were facing many restrictions on our freedom in terms of what we could say, what we could do, where we could go, and particularly myself because I was the woman of the family. Once, I took my son for his first haircut and I had to watch through a peephole because women weren't allowed. He looked scared and I felt sorry. But, as you know, my husband is from Tunis and our household staff was from Morocco, so it was an opportunity for them to go to Mecca. I went to Mecca with my mother-in-law. My husband drove us past the sign that said "Non-Muslims Exit Here". We went into Mecca and that was quite an experience for me.

After my mom passed, my dad married my stepmom who was religiously observant. They agreed to come visit us in Jeddah only on the grounds that we would travel with them to Israel. It was like, we'll come visit you in Jeddah in "that place" as long as you'll come with us to Israel. They came into Jeddah and visited us there and then we flew to the northern border of Saudi to Tabuk. We got a vehicle and we drove up through Jordan and crossed over into Israel. My husband was very ambivalent about making that visit, so he forgot his passport and we had a big rush home to make sure that he would have his passport so we could get on the plane. We took this family unit from Jeddah, to Amman, to Jerusalem where we reunited with a member of my dad's family who survived the Holocaust.

So, there was something about the whole thing, all these putting things together that didn't necessarily go together so easily when we were in that region. Of course, I was Jewish, and at least at the time, you didn't say you were Jewish in Saudi Arabia. In those years, in Jeddah I never mentioned to a Saudi contact that I was Jewish. So some of it was very difficult. I needed to repress my identity, I needed to repress my gender and I was a relatively young mother and raising kids. During the Jeddah period we adopted our third child, we adopted from Tunis, so we had a little hop over to bring her back and then our family was complete. I was going along working for the government and, at the same

time I was trying to have the life of a woman with a family and I believe it was challenging when I look back on it. It was challenging to do all of those things.

Q: It sounds like it. How did you find the public affairs staff?

BERG: Excellent! For our expat student advisor, I think the pressure of the place made her irritable, as noted above. I had a top flight staff member who was Algerian and who had worked at the embassy in Algiers. Because he was a musician and teacher, he was on the hit list of the Islamic FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) party in Algiers and our embassy had wanted to help him to find another position where his life would not be in danger. So he came over to work in Jeddah and was highly effective. We had a wonderful Syrian national working on the media side, so there was a media specialist and a cultural specialist and they were phenomenal, really excellent. So well connected and strategic. Then we had a Yemeni driver who was nearing the end of his career; he took his retirement in cash, returned to Yemen and started a new family, not my idea of retirement but it worked for him.

Q: How did you find the press, you're dealing with the press?

BERG: I still hear the same editors giving commentary on the radio to Western reporters today, so they are hanging in there. We had a good relationship with the Saudi press. They know us well. (I am extremely sorry that long after I gave this oral history interview, Jamal Khashoggi who was one of my interlocutors met a violent death at the government's hands.)

Q: Did 9/11, the attack on the twin towers in New York, happen while you were there?

BERG: 9/11 happened when I was in Riyadh. The Taliban actually had representation in Riyadh, which the Saudi's severed directly after 9/11.

I went to Riyadh from Jeddah. My husband had a position in Saudi with Lucent and he wanted to stay for a few more years. Another male spouse had helped him to find a great position. It seems right to build a career on both spouses' professional requirements, not just one, though I wasn't so keen to go to Riyadh. I had gone up there a couple of times and it was so different from Jeddah. In Jeddah, people hadn't bought in so much to the closed society.

Q: You were there for two years?

BERG: I was in Riyadh for two years. When I got to Riyadh there was a switch in ambassadors and DCMs (Deputy Chief of Mission). There was no public affairs officer in the country, no ambassador, and Margaret Scobey had just arrived as DCM. Before she got to post — if you could have been a fly on the wall in Riyadh, you would have heard the negativity of officers there about a woman DCM coming to that post — it was unbelievable. They were not supportive of having a woman DCM. She got there and it seems like just days later, we had 9/11. One of my memories is of Margaret taking

control of that mission and leading that mission brilliantly and turning everybody around. I have this memory of Margaret and her ability to assert her authority in a constructive way, take the reins and make that embassy work properly through a terrible crisis. She was so impressive. She quickly debunked the myth that we could not have a successful woman DCM in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Q: And we are finding again and again when we try these things, thanks to the fact that we hire first rate women in the Foreign Service, basically, they perform brilliantly. Do you know where she is now?

BERG: She went on to serve as ambassador in Egypt and Syria, such a powerful, ethical woman.

Q: Were you doing something different there than in Jeddah?

BERG: Well, I was the cultural attaché up there and I got to work closely with the Ministry of Education and the minister was Khalid bin Muhammad Al-Anqari, who favored reform, critical thinking, and improvement in women's education. That was exciting. He was part of the movement for private colleges and very forward looking.

Q: Were you involved in trying to set up foreign universities?

BERG: I wasn't in Riyadh long before we had to manage 9/11, so our public affairs office needed to focus more on crisis management and the aftermath.

Q: What did we do, the embassy, go into shock?

BERG: There was the whole unfolding of the story that these were Saudi terrorists. We were in the sending country. The Saudis were having a hard time processing this information, as were we. Tensions ran quite high. In hindsight, I recall how "checked out" we were on some level, not understanding how radically the tides were turning. Imagine, at Consulate Jeddah in the region of Mecca, and Medina, where you theoretically could only go if you're Muslim, we didn't have any Americans on the team who could visit these places. But even more broadly, we were just missing so much, since our interlocutors were mostly quite western-leaning. And sadly in 2004, there would be the attack on Consulate Jeddah.

I'd visit Medina to meet the literature club, but not inside the city, just on the outskirts where non-Muslims could be. A delegation came out to me from the writers' association. But my work in Saudi was genuinely about culture. I wasn't a reporting officer. Soft diplomacy.

The society was complicated by this artificial hobbling of people's ability to communicate or interact, whether due to gender or faith, all of this is stove-piping of people, so they really don't know what's going on around them. People were also stove-piped within the family because there's so much communication inside the family,

but not across families so much. It's like a willful vacuum of information that causes a lot of distortion in how reality is understood. It was hobbling, and I could try to create avenues where information and opportunities could pass more freely, across the gender divide, across the faith divide, across the national divides, across the family divides.

That's a challenge, but 9/11 was a symptom of so many things gone wrong. One of the things that obviously went wrong was our failure of intelligence. People would come over to the ambassador's residence and I remember a contact saying, "Lora, fire is burning beneath the ground, fire is running...". OK, fire is running beneath the ground... People were trying to say to us that the tension was explosive and we were not hearing what they were saying. People would say to you that they don't want Israel to be there at all, right? People would be angry about our policies. People would say things to you, and you would hear those things and think, oh, you know, that's just what they say over here. Actually, people tend to say what they mean. Sometimes we would hear those things so often, like "We're really angry at your country because you say you support democracy, but you're not doing anything for democracy here." And we would think, ok, that's what people say over here. But they're saying it because they mean it! We don't listen very well.

Q: Yes. What COULD you do for democracy?

BERG: Only what I just mentioned – to create avenues for information sharing across these artificial willful divides that were isolating people from each other, which I really did for six years and then I was very tired.

Q: Did the embassy after 9/11 sort of go into lock-down or do anything particular?

BERG: There was kind of a hardening of positions and a feeling that our Saudi contacts, I felt, were becoming more rigid, feeling the need to take sides. I felt a pulling apart, a separating. It was a very difficult time and I think there was a lot of denial in not wanting to think that somehow this had really had its origin in Saudi Arabia. There was a lot of denial. People were angry, I think. In a way, I think the Saudis felt a lot of anger and resentment and frustration that if this thing really happened because of Saudi Arabia then it must be someone else's fault, that someone else created the conditions for this attack to take place, and of course, we are interconnected so there was a grain of truth in this perception, but ultimately this problem had a significant homegrown element. It was a very difficult time; not a happy time.

Q: Was the bin Laden family important in Riyadh?

BERG: More in Jeddah. They were a Jeddah family but they had a vast construction empire.

Q: In the '50s I lived in a house built by the bin Laden construction firm.

BERG: That's interesting! I don't know who built our house, and I have never been back, though I have Saudi friends whom I visit with elsewhere.

Q: After 9/11 was the embassy deluged by investigators trying to find out who knew what?

BERG: Everything changed. The kind of person who was attracted to the portfolio changed. It used to be more people with a deep affection for the Middle East, who'd spent years studying Arabic and trying to go to every capital, to go in every *suk* (traditional Arab bazaar), and meet every intellectual, and travel across the region. And suddenly it was an army of people with completely different inclinations and interests – online radicalization experts, much more intelligence and military and so forth. It was a very different environment. People came for short times. It was just attracting a completely different world of people. They weren't really so interested in the insights of people from the old school. It was a different world after that.

Q: Did you find that the Saudis who would go over to the United States were beginning to pull back?

BERG: Yes, and there was a period there anyway, because when I was there it was "Saudi-ization" and wanting to Saudi-ize everything and not wanting to have as much connectivity, including not wanting to send everybody abroad to study. I understand that later, a lot of work has been done to revitalize ties including through education. Many Saudis are coming to study in the United States again. I don't know the next part of the story, only the part when I was there.

Q: How did you get around? You weren't allowed to drive, were you?

BERG: There was an excellent motor pool. And unfortunately after 9/11 the motor pool drivers were subjected to so much increased screening of their own bodies on a daily basis. We all understood, but it was an example of how interpersonal relations became more strained and distant. Trust was broken and that impacted everyone.

The drivers took me everywhere, but nevertheless it was a difficult environment for a woman to be in, physically moving out and trying to do outreach. I think I internalized a lot, while going about my work. Even the guards in the diplomatic quarter made me uneasy. As a woman, I felt quite paranoid, but the paranoia was about something real.

Q: To go in a suk, did you have to sort of drape yourself?

BERG: This was one of the difficulties. At the time in Saudi, women were supposed to wear a black robe. Occasionally the embassy would take a stand and say, we are Western and we don't need to wear this black robe and we need to go to these meetings in our business suits. But if you didn't wear the black robe, you were just causing problems for yourself. Men were making the policies for women officers, first of all. They weren't dealing with any of those issues. So I wore a black robe (abaya) that looked like an

academic gown; it had little snaps in front. And really, women had ways to make their abayas look distinctive. I had a patch of Turkmen embroidery that I sewed on the back of mine. And I would just throw that on; it made it a little easier for me to maneuver.

When I left Saudi Arabia I felt like I was moving out of a black-and-white movie into technicolor. It was so radical to move back into a bright world. For a while I just thought, why did I do that? Why did I stay there for six years, what was I thinking? When I first came out I think I might have had some kind of PTSD (post-traumatic stress syndrome), not from an immediate trauma, but from the incredible psychological pressure of being a Jewish woman for so long in that place. I really think so.

One night toward the end of all of this I was at an event with Margaret (Scobey) in a tent that a prince was hosting with a lot of men. He gave us elegant robes to wear, the winter ones with the fur on the inside. We were there and he got up and he took the microphone and he gave some kind of speech and he said, “I know there are a lot of people in this room who think that all Jews should be killed.” I have of course a strong memory of this. I looked at Margaret, Margaret looked at me. At this moment, which was the end of my tour of duty in Saudi, I took the microphone and said, “I’m Jewish, I’m married to a Muslim man, I don’t think this kind of *blah blah...*”. I gave my momentous revelation that I was a Jewish person in my sixth year in the kingdom and the host was so discomfited.

It seems like the next day this beautiful letter arrived at my home in gorgeous calligraphy, explaining that there was no intention to be.... Wanting to be a good host, would never have meant to do something that would be upsetting to a guest.... It was such a sincere missive that arrived. But that was it for me. Then I needed to leave. I thought, I’ve given all of these years of my life in a region where my gender, religion and even nationality are problematic. I wanted to live someplace for a while without these complications. So, when my tour ended, I left the Arab World and I didn’t serve there again, though my work at the German Marshall Fund took me to Morocco a few times. I enjoyed keeping contact with the Arab World through Arab connections in Europe. I don’t miss being in the Middle East, and at the same time, I don’t regret my years of service there. The culture remains a big part of my life. Thoughts come to my mind in Arabic, and we definitely cook recipes from the region in our home. I’m so proud of my family for coming on this journey with me and helping me to be able to pursue my career.

Q: I’ve heard that sort of behind the screen the women get together and have these gorgeous gowns and they sit around and chat in sort of their own world.

BERG: It is, but also it’s not such a healthy world. A lot is missing. Segregation takes a toll. There was use of antidepressant medication. And the women could be very supportive of each other, but also make difficulties for each other, informing on each other and doing things that you do when you’re locked in an oppressive situation. But there’s also just an incredibly strong strand of feeling that Westerners don’t understand the culture and shouldn’t judge... And then the ambivalence of wanting the U.S. to help bring about change and not support oppression.

I remember Jimmy Carter coming over and the women activists asking him, “You are talking about human rights all the time. What about Saudi women?” And Jimmy Carter said something like, we understand this is a different culture, and although I am a fan of Jimmy Carter, how could he not say something more supportive in that context?

Q: Did the Saudi women look down upon women in other Muslim countries, like Iran or ...?

BERG: Saudi women, the ones I interacted with, a lot of them are really educated with strong international connectivity. That’s so impressive to me. The level of education is impressive to me among the elite there. Not all were members of a moneyed elite, but there’s an intellectual elite. At the same time, I think there was so much pain, unnecessary pain in that scenario.

Q: Did you have any view, or had it developed enough, as to what was happening at these American universities that were being established in Saudi Arabia.

BERG: Well, the one that I was dealing with was this one in Jeddah. I thought they were off to a pretty good start. They were trying hard to be as empowering as they could be in the environment and with the restrictions that they were facing.

Q: Where would a woman be pointed?

BERG: Women had professional choices – medicine, journalism, for example. Women were needed to fill all the positions going up, for example in the education establishment you need women to direct schools, you need women to direct universities, you need women to be deans. Almost because of segregation, there were job opportunities because men couldn’t take those jobs. There was that side of the story, and women do have wealth. They had quite an important role, for example in the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce). There was one woman who had a shipping company, very powerful.

But those women who could do those things nevertheless had to have some man in their lives who was willing to support their growth. Amazing women, and patient because that environment tries patience. At times, I just felt insulted by men who felt like they could say things to me about where I was walking or what I was doing or what I was wearing. I look back, and it seems difficult to me.

Q: It sounds like a very difficult role.

BERG: Our mission was ambivalent. The other thing I really need to say is that, of course, I spent six years of my life there, I had good Saudi friends, and there were many Saudi families who were so kind to us. Whatever I may feel about the system, it’s a world of people, and there were people there I really respected a lot. My children were youngsters there and thrived.

Q: You left there in 2002, was it? Then where did you go?

BERG: Yes. I took a year of Slovak and then we went to Bratislava.

Q: Why were you going to Bratislava?

BERG: We had been transiting through Europe every year. Every year we had a trip home because it was a hardship environment. The flights went through Frankfurt. You would fly out of Saudi and land in this green world and we started to develop a fondness for Europe. I think it's partly because we were coming out of Saudi, but when we would transit Europe we would just be transfixed. So we had this idea to go there and the open post was Bratislava. Off we went to Bratislava, which was a charming place.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the language. How did you find Slovak?

BERG: I had a lot of fun learning Slovak. My dad was Polish. He was born in Warsaw. I was starting to learn Slovak in my dad's last year of life. I could talk to him a little bit in Slovak, and I think he was excited that we were going there. So that was rewarding on the personal front. It's not that different from Polish. My husband studied Slovak with me, and we became close with our teachers. We still visit our Slovak teacher today.

Q: I would think it would be simpler than Polish, wouldn't it?

BERG: I think it's about the same as Polish. It has cases. But, we went, it was recently post-communist, and they were preparing to join the European Union, so it was an exciting time in that capable small country. People there are so talented and well trained, in the arts, sports, business. They have excellent self-discipline and are very self-sufficient.

Q: You were there in 2003?

BERG: 2003 to 2006. A special memory is that I had the opportunity to do some programming with Roma, the Roma minority. When I look back on my Foreign Service career a lot of the work I did turned out to be about inclusive leadership and inclusive societies. It was about sharing the U.S. experience on inclusion and empowerment, with women, with minorities, bringing new audiences into our programming, around inclusion. It was enjoyable, I loved that work.

Q: Your job initially, what was it?

BERG: I was in public affairs.

Q: Who was ambassador at the time?

BERG: The ambassador was Ronald Weiser, a real estate baron, like our ambassador in Bridgetown. A business leader from Ann Arbor, Michigan. He was Jewish and I think

his mom had been in the Vaudeville (theatrical genre of variety). He had roots in the region. The Slovak Republic was big in the auto industry. It was the number one auto producer per capita. After communism, they had great success attracting auto producers. It was still in that period. So the Michigan connection made sense.

This is an irony. We were working so hard to get American investment in the auto industry in the Slovak Republic, and now we might ask, why would we be doing that? The argument was that, somehow, for every auto industry job in the Slovak Republic, jobs would be created back in the United States. Does that sound convincing? I'm not sure I understood the economic argument, maybe it makes sense, but the Slovak Republic was starting to prosper. And our auto industry was in steep decline. Maybe people at the top were making out well. And of course, we were concerned for the Slovaks to have a smooth transition out of communism and into the European Union.

I have this general question about foreign policy: what is the feedback system for our policies? How do we assess the impact of the policies? Looking back, it seems to me that unlike other areas of policy where the feedback loop can be very strong, for example a local official losing an election, in foreign policy there is still a tendency to try things and not face consequences, regardless of the impact on people at home or abroad. We had country plans with clear goals set and tried to meet those goals, but sometimes those goals were off.

Q: You were basically a public affairs officer? What was the media like there?

BERG: Yes. It was post-communist and the media environment was very open. At that time, the period that I was there, the government was quite progressive and they were getting ready to join the European Union. When they joined the European Union, I remember the border posts came down between Austria and the Slovak Republic. It was exciting. People in villages on the two sides of the border had never seen each other's places! Efforts were being made to get people connected. I was there in a window of a truly liberal government in the Slovak Republic, which consequently pulled back into a more populist kind of position. But when I was there it was a moment of great energy and openness, and it was fun to be there. There was so much optimism, and young people were taking positions of great responsibility because of the generational change away from communism. The parliament was so young, the opposite of what we have here.

Q: How was America viewed at the time you were there?

BERG: America was viewed very positively; the Republicans and Reagan were on a pedestal and there was an idea that Reaganism brought down the Soviet empire. Americans who were working in the Slovak Republic, more than in other places where I served, tended Republican. You had Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad (organizations intended to solicit election support from voters in foreign countries). In the Slovak Republic we had a very high percentage representation of Republicans Abroad.

It was part of this dismantling of communism and this opening up. All kinds of money had been flowing to build civil society institutions and a free press. By the time I was there, that was about to end because they graduated into no longer being recipients of aid. That's a fly over of my days in Slovakia; it was a very positive time. I worked a Bush-Putin summit there in 2005. Our office had a small book translation program and we translated the children's book of Andy Warhol's nephew James Warhola, "Uncle Andy's". We went out to Eastern Slovakia with the artist and he met up with the Warhol family. All kinds of creative soft diplomacy projects. But the work I think was significant was the work that I did with the Roma people and working around inclusion.

Q: What was the feeling that you would get from your local employees and others towards the Czechs?

BERG: The stereotype is that the Slovaks are more traditional and more religious, less sophisticated than the Czechs. But the Slovaks are very sophisticated, multilingual and oh my goodness, their music and arts! They're so close to Vienna -- 45 minutes or so from Vienna -- it's right up the road, and then Budapest is right down the road the other way. They were all part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Their music is exquisite, their theatre, their ballet, their opera. They have great athletes, they have famous ice hockey. Culturally speaking, it's a wonderful country.

Q: Were you able to travel around the area?

BERG: We traveled. We would go in the middle of winter, a little bit south, and be able to be in an outdoor hot spring in the snow. It was beautiful, a beautiful experience. After spending so long in the Arab World, I was getting back to Jewish roots, and my husband agreed for my son to have a *bar mitzvah* in Bratislava. For me and my family, because our family members had perished in the Holocaust, being able to celebrate a *bar mitzvah* in Bratislava, not so far from where my father had his *bar mitzvah*, it was really special. It was meaningful for us to be able to do that.

Q: Was there much of Jewish community left?

BERG: Just a fragile, very fragile.... I'm sorry to say, but there is still a reflexive anti-Semitism in the region. There's also anti-Muslim sentiment. But that didn't affect us at all. We were treated kindly and it was really nice to be there, but it doesn't change the fact that being a minority of any kind in that region can still be trying.

Q: I recently saw a movie that goes back to the 50s, The Little Shop on the Main Street (The Shop on Main Street, 1965), which shows how the Jews lived in this little town in Slovakia and then how the authorities were turning in some, putting them all on trains to go to Auschwitz.

BERG: It's Europe. And some Jewish survivors were killed when they got back home, because people didn't want to return property. Apart from the Holocaust, national identities in Europe are constructed painfully, I think, with so many borders and the fear

of being subsumed by other countries. Europe is densely populated and has many nations. The Slovak Republic is this very small nation. How do you do that, how do you create a national identity, how do you hold onto it with neighbors on your borders who are also struggling to do the same thing and have their language groups present in your territory? Where does one country stop and the next begin? The European Union as a project tries to address this, and I think it does so successfully, tamping down conflict.

Q: I imagine a lot of the youths would be leaving.

BERG: Because they joined the European Union, suddenly all of these possibilities to go and study in other cities in Europe opened up for the Slovak people. The Slovak young generation is very cosmopolitan because they can have experiences abroad. Just a generation before they couldn't go West.

Q: Did you develop Slovakian friends and all?

BERG: Yes. It's a wonderful place. My husband was painting and wrote a book of stories that was published while we were there. He gave exhibits and we enjoyed interacting with Slovak artists at the personal level. They are known for great children's book illustrators and have a fine art school. It's a plumb post, families enjoy serving there. It's a place people think of fondly. It was a treat to serve there.

Q: Do you think your programs are working?

BERG: I dug in a little bit on these issues around prejudice and racism. I was able to get a couple of books translated into Slovak and available to Slovak audiences. One was a children's book about the Holocaust. And then there was a wonderful book called *We Are the Romani People* by Ian Hancock, a professor who is Roma-American at the University of Texas. We had his book translated to raise awareness and he came over to go around and to speak at schools. We took him to speak to Roma kids and it was touching, it was moving. One little boy said, "Don't you wake up and wish you weren't Roma?" A Roma kid saying that, how much they feel like they don't even want to be themselves because their environment makes it so difficult to be themselves. He was there and he could say, "I'm so proud to be Roma and I'm so proud to see you and to see the future of the Roma people and what you're bringing..." He just had a way to be able to inspire the kids, so that was special. Moments like that you always remember, when you can do something that opens doors for people. That was fun. Shall we stop after Slovak Republic?

Q: Where did you go after Slovak Republic?

BERG: We went home on the Una Chapman Cox Fellowship for a year to do some identity work ourselves around the congruences between Muslim and Jewish traditions. Karim, my husband, and I did an Una Chapman Cox year together and went on a speaking tour, and did some writing.

Q: Why don't we pick it up there next time when you're on this project of Jewish-Muslim relationship?

Q: This is an addendum to our previous conversation and I'll ask this question again. Did you find that being in Saudi Arabia for six years, which is a long time in that country, intensified your Jewishness?

BERG: Yes. I hadn't given much thought to Judaism, just felt happy to 'be' Jewish. I'm not religious. It's true that I did have a couple of colleagues in Saudi who were Jewish. For some reason, being there, we wanted to celebrate holidays together. For example, we would have a *Seder*. The Jewish colleagues would have a *Seder*. They would open the door for Elijah and call him in. You feel like you're doing something almost—. You're standing up against this whole oppressive system by opening the door and calling in the prophet Elijah, who actually exists in all three traditions of the Book. It is a feeling of vindication, of persevering.

And then this decision I never thought would float into my brain, to have a *bar mitzvah* for a family member was the last thing I would have thought of. But when I heard that comment in that room about all Jews should be killed.... Of course, you could hear it there but just as likely in the U.S. at some far right gathering, it's not just because I was in Saudi. It's just that I heard it and hearing it tipped something in my brain. I needed to do something for my heritage. I felt, in a certain way, if the region was really about the destruction of my heritage, that is quite a difficult thing to be involved in soft diplomacy, in a region that doesn't want you to exist.

But, obviously, that's not the case. In my experience, most people I encountered in the Arab World were very tolerant, in actions if not always in words. The region is amazing, diverse, and has Jewish populations, and it is complex, and it is full of people that are accepting. It's just that there are certain trends and those trends of hate and polarization are starting to affect all regions of the globe. Like wildfires. But yes, it was a wakeup call for me just a bit, that it was time for me to balance myself out and understand things better. One of the reasons a few years later that I would pursue the Una Chapman Cox fellowship was to try to take a step back and reflect on identity.

Q: Well, somebody like myself who's basically a non-believer, I can sit back and look at all these peculiar people and they all, probably the religious people, would hate me, but I don't have to say anything about it. I think they're wrong; there just isn't anything out there. But if you are identified as Jewish, a sort of a stamp is put on you, sort of by the religion, that makes you feel strongly about this identity.

BERG: I feel strongly about inclusion. Over the years this has crystalized. I feel strongly that there's a place for all of us at the table, whatever our gender, or gay or straight, or Jewish or agnostic, or Muslim or Buddhist, or whatever we are, old or young. I appreciate that the United States works deeply on this, even if there is backlash. We are

working on how to live together constructively across differences. We haven't made it; we're not over the hurdle, but we work on it consistently and we make lots of mistakes, but we keep trying. That's something writ large about our culture that I love and I enjoyed sharing. It wasn't a motivating approach in Saudi society to be inclusive; at the same time, Saudi has a huge representation of people from all over the globe who are working there and living there. I think in their own way, they will get around to it. At the time of course, no religious institutions could exist in Saudi except for mosques. Expats practiced their faiths quietly, in private.

Q: I don't think I'm being Pollyannish, but the longer I look at this, interviewing people like yourself, the United States really is playing a major role in not really turning things around, but it's pointing other countries and other people in the direction of taking a look at these things. Here we are, a big and powerful country, with all our problems and all our mistakes, we're there trying to do good. I think we are making other countries and other peoples face up to this. We've got our problems right now. This guy, Donald Trump, is basically a racist and all, running under the Republicans' Party. I hope that he'll be squashed in our elections in a couple of months, but who knows. The forces of intolerance are certainly in every country and they're coming out that we have it. We try to do something about it.

BERG: Yes. We're not hiding, I think. We're in discussion, in debate, and in conversation and living it every day. And that helps us work through these things.

Q: I hate to say it, but we're a marvelous society with lots of warts.

Q: Today is August 24, 2016. Where did we leave off?

BERG: I think we're back in Washington for the Una Chapman Cox Fellowship.

Q: First, I want to ask, and I may have asked before but I don't remember doing, when you went to Saudi Arabia, was there any provision for people who were Jewish who didn't want to go, or is it just a personnel thing now.

BERG: I wanted to go, so I never asked about this. It was one of those posts at the time where a lot of people went who might not have wanted to go. But I wanted to be there. I guess there was a group of people who really wanted to be there, regional experts, and then there were people who got assigned there because it was the only assignment left.

Q: Well, among other things, it's one of the points where for people who are interested in American diplomacy things are happening and they want to understand what's happening. There are other places too that are part of the turmoil of the Middle East.

BERG: I'm glad I was able to be in the Middle East all those years, formative years for me professionally and personally.

Q: When I went to Saudi Arabia they wouldn't assign Jewish personnel there.

BERG: When I was there, we had a presence, the political counselor, a political officer and his family, and myself.

Q: This was over 50 years ago and things have changed. Before, we wouldn't have assigned Jewish officers to other Arab countries, and now we have ambassadors.

BERG: That's interesting. I didn't know that.

Q: What is the Una Chapman Cox Program and how did you get into it?

BERG: Una Chapman Cox is a sabbatical year. The Una Chapman Cox Foundation (a non-profit organization that works to support the effectiveness and professionalism of the United States Foreign Service through various projects, initiatives, and grants) supports many valuable endeavors to strengthen the Foreign Service. One of those is a sabbatical year that is a competitive fellowship project where you submit a proposal for something you want to do for growth and development, to take a step out and put things in perspective. Rejoin, refresh – it's a kind of leadership exploration, but independently designed. I spent my Una Chapman Cox year with my husband, learning more about the relationship of Judaism and Islam, and doing public speaking.

Something I forgot to tell you was, when we were in the Slovak Republic, my son's *bar mitzvah* was with a Lubavitch orthodox rabbi from Brooklyn because the only rabbis out there were from the United States. The rabbis were on a mission to revive Jewish communities. They were reclaiming Jewish people who had lost their Judaism, and were very accepting of our family, but it was a stretch for me. I was on a receiving line at the ambassador's residence and the rabbi refused to shake hands with me because I'm a woman and you don't shake hands with a woman when you are an orthodox male. I just remember turning to my husband in disbelief. I had just come from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where orthodox men wouldn't shake hands with me because I was female, and here I was getting the same treatment from an American rabbi. This is meant to be respectful, but I wasn't receiving it that way.

I was very indignant at the time and there were a lot of discoveries coming to the surface for us. I found out that my husband was much better at interfacing with a Lubavitch rabbi than I. He was much more on a wavelength coming from his background as a theology student in Tunisia than I ever could be as a non-practicing American Jew. For me it was just stupefying, but it all made sense to him. He and the rabbi would drive around together with the bar mitzvah boys in the back seat. Of all the astonishing things, there was that. A person grounded in Muslim religious tradition and a religious Jew could get on pretty well. Somehow, my husband understood the thought processes.

We kept finding these similarities. I had never been involved in Jewish practice, but we would go from time to time to the rabbi's place and Karim would say, "Oh, you know, that's what we do", and "Oh yes, we say the same thing", and "Oh yes, we have that prayer." Everything was the same -- even the way you wash your hands and you pour the

water three times on each hand from a pitcher. So, at a certain point, it became important to me to understand the similarities better. I thought, when we go home, we should talk to people about the way the origins and practices of these faiths are very similar. Now, today, everybody talks about it. In Europe sometimes, Jewish and Muslim advocates work together for religious practices to have a space in society. For example, in Europe there are people against ritual animal slaughter and for animal rights, who don't think traditional slaughter should be legal. But some rabbis and imams stand together and they go together to lobby governments on this kind of issue. Really I began to think that Judeo-Christian tradition is more of a Judeo-Islamic-Christian tradition, and that we need to understand each other better.

It's kind of funny, but at the time we were just discovering all that and we were excited to come home and to go around the country and tell people a little bit about our growth together, our experiences together with our Muslim and Jewish backgrounds, and what we had been learning, and also to explore together a little more of an open Jewish practice because neither of us really knew much about Judaism. Karim knows a lot about Islam and I knew a little about Islam, but we hadn't learned a lot about Judaism. It was and continues to be part of our journey. I joined the Beth Chai congregation in Bethesda, a humanist Jewish congregation, and Karim and the Rabbi gave some adult learning presentations together. I'm sure this willingness to explore identities would shock some people in religious communities, but we were fortunate to be with open minded people. And if I didn't mention this before, we were fortunate from the start that our parents were accepting.

Q: So, this project that you sold to the Cox Foundation was to go around...?

BERG: We did some public speaking, we did some writing and learning, and I did some exploration of Jewish tradition, because I really had very little exposure to it. I took a Hebrew course and so on, but it was a busy year and it went by really fast. We were writing, both of us were writing then and we did some speaking engagements up and down the east coast. And we had three children in school at the time, all of us packed in a two bedroom temporary apartment.

Q: Tell me some of the experiences you had.

BERG: Much of it was unexpected. There was one community we went to visit, a more conservative Jewish community, where the audience was not comfortable at all with what we had to say. We did a talk in New York City where there was lots of excitement and everybody was very engaged. It put some balance in our lives too. The truth is, I spent a very long time in the Arab world. Coming back, and being able to really reflect on Jewish identity, was a joy, and my husband gave his support. I felt more grounded after that year, ready to go out in the field again.

Q: Would you write to Jewish communities and say, here, I can do this if you want?

BERG: We wrote to friends, some at universities. It was mostly through friends, it was through social capital that we already had, mostly not through cold calls.

Q: Did you find some communities or people that would really say, these things aren't the same and we've got to stick to our ways, to hell with these others? What were you getting?

BERG: I don't think people could argue with the fact that the traditions are incredibly similar. It is astonishing the deeper in you go, how much is the same. You can't argue with it because this is fact based, but you do find people who don't believe you should marry outside your community. As mixed as we are as a nation, this doesn't change the fact that there are individuals who just think that it's not right to marry outside your community. For Jewish people in this category, I think it's upsetting to see a Jewish woman going around, being proud that she's in an interfaith marriage. In Islam, Muslim men are permitted to marry Jewish and Christian women, people of the book. I think with Jewish communities, there can be a sense of fragility and such a strong desire to right wrongs and to ensure continuity. I don't hold this against anyone, it is just a different way of looking at things. We named our older children with names that work in both faith traditions, Abraham and Miriam. By the time we adopted our youngest, we were getting creative and named her Giselle, a name you also find in both Hebrew and Arabic.

Q: This, of course, raises something that governments may not like, but accept the fact that this gets down to families.

BERG: Yes. Around Washington there's a lot of interaction between Jewish and Muslim organized communities. People here really work on this; they meet up, they have joint action together, service-learning opportunities. They do a lot together in our region, which is really admirable. It wasn't as common back when we were visiting around on our year. People are engaged deeply in this kind of interfaith work now.

Q: Things have really changed. It's dramatic. For example, the hijab was not even an issue because you didn't see it that much, but then people who got out and interacted. But now, we even had a swimmer...

BERG: I think she was a fencer.

Q: Did you find that the rabbis that you came across were a mixed breed as far as how they viewed what you were preaching?

BERG: Well I hope we weren't preaching. For us it was exciting to be able to tell our story, share our story, and be able to gain some more knowledge, also getting updated about how the United States was changing. That was also part of the project of the Una Chapman Cox, to have you home and also to have you learn new things about this great United States.

Q: One of the things too that you're up against, maybe it wasn't overt, but you met some opposition, but the Jewish community is under a lot of pressure because of intermarriage. The children come around, but I know an awful lot of Jewish families that have disintegrated into regular, non-practicing because of the intermarriage.

BERG: Yes. Well, the much faster growing part of the Jewish community is orthodox. Another funny story that popped in my mind, a little bit unrelated, but about culture shock such as when this rabbi wouldn't shake my hand. When we came out of Saudi and went to the Slovak Republic, my kids were still used to women being all covered up and the men in long white robes. Everybody was covered, really, when you think about it. I took the kids to Croatia, where, for whatever reason, some old men were standing out there on the rocks looking at the sea, not wearing anything. I took my children there and it was just something about how incredibly diverse this world is. You come out of a place where the system is so controlled and monolithic and kind of single path, then you come out and you're in this crazy patchwork world where everyone is different. I try to imagine what all of that must have felt like to the kids. They were such good travelers, and all three tell me that they appreciate their childhoods and the way we lived out in the world. We don't regret it!

Q: Right now we've got this incredible clash of civilizations where you have radical Islam, but there are other groups which are all trying to say you have to obey our strictures. This comes from Christian communities too. Maybe I'm wrong, but certainly Jewish... Catholic religion is no longer the same thing, but you still have fundamentalist Protestants, located mainly in the south. To me, I'm a Foreign Service officer, and I look at this and I say, we're talking about power. These are people who want things to be done their way. When you look, the reason why the various strictures about what to wear and all that, in the sacred writings these are the ones that are dreamed up in another time, almost by committees. Not so much in the Catholic Church, it has changed so much.

BERG: Yes, it is hard for me to understand why the political issue is so often about women, whether women are covered, whether women can have abortions, how to control women, how women are supposed to embody a faith or culture or nationality. France is all wrapped in it right now, outlawing the veil, a lot of attention and negative energy around the symbolism of what women wear. We really need to channel our energy more toward peace, innovation, sustainability.

Q: We are right here, in Arlington, talking, and we've got one of the major Muslim centers, and you see women in every type of full veils and life goes on. It's a problem that people who are not very smart get wrapped up in these things. Life is changing so much. My son is married to a Catholic from a devout Catholic family, but you no longer pay a lot of attention. You don't get the strictness. When I was a young lad, I'm now 88, I was told, you don't want to date Catholic girls because they will force your children to become Catholics. That's just gone.

BERG: I remember that too – would you marry someone who wasn't Jewish? That's what Jewish kids asked each other at school, and some would say, never!

Q: After this year what were you...?

BERG: So, from the fellowship we went to Paris. I went to work as the cultural attaché for the U.S. mission to France. Jim Bullock was serving as Minister Counselor for Public Affairs, and brought me there. I'm forever grateful.

Q: Somehow, running a culturally oriented program in the heart of the extreme culture sounds almost more difficult than trying to convert...

BERG: It was a dream job, it was a beautiful job. I had the minorities outreach portfolio because, by that time 9/11 had happened and the European bureau (Bureau of European Affairs at the U.S. Department of State) had gone through its reflection that it had no contacts in the Muslim and minority communities of Europe. They had appointed a brilliant, high energy special representative to Muslim communities, Farah Pandith, who was flying all around Europe and making connections with young diverse leaders. This expanded into a minority outreach portfolio, conducting outreach to minority and underserved communities. And in Paris a very impressive locally employed staff member developed expertise and guided this portfolio, Randianina Peccoud. The whole staff in cultural affairs was so talented and dedicated.

Of course, it was in France where, officially, there are no minorities and, officially, you don't talk about faith because it is a private matter. It was funny because we were just moving there from our great year of talking about faith and we came to France where such discussions would really be quite inappropriate. Everyone is French and you're not black or white or brown or anything, and you're not Muslim or Catholic, or anything else, you're French. They don't have dual identities or hyphenated identities officially. Unofficially, there are all kinds of barriers to employment, to advancement, to education, just like anywhere. It's difficult, it's complicated, and in some ways similar to some of the issues we grapple with here in the United States.

I really was lucky because I was poised to do the work. I had been in Europe before because I had been in Slovakia. It was a very different environment, but I understood something about the European approach to work. I hadn't mentioned what a big change it was to go from Saudi where people in service roles were very focused on the people they served, rather than on written job duties and competencies. Everything happened at the personal level, that's how things moved. When you get to Europe it's everybody doing their contracted work and doing it right and people are much more autonomous in a certain way. It was important to be very careful with time, job descriptions and duties. I was lucky to make my adjustment to some aspects of Europe in the Slovak Republic, under the radar. By the time I got to France I knew how to manage a team in Europe and I had a great team with an interesting, beautiful portfolio. I loved it. What an amazing opportunity that was.

Q: Did we have at that point – we’re talking about 2011 – did we have tools developed or were you sent to go ahead and do what you can?

BERG: You would sit at your desk as the cultural attaché in Paris and the email would just ping ping ping. It was coming every second with everything you can imagine, like “I want to build a giant orb in the middle of the...”. Everyone wanted to do something in Paris. Every American who thought of him/herself as a cultural person had a grand dream to do something in Paris and they all thought they would write to the cultural attaché. Somebody wanted to play the Eiffel Tower with mallets – he was going to make the Eiffel Tower into an instrument and play it with mallets. I would get every single thing a person could dream of; it would come on my desk. Then there were the big things, the New York City Ballet.... Everyone who was anyone and everyone who aspired to be someone would write to the cultural attaché.

Q: So, what did you do?

BERG: And then mixed in with it, in addition to all the culture, the pressure on the cultural side, there was the minority outreach portfolio that the U.S. Government was obsessed with at the time for understandable reasons. It was a matter of setting priorities, and by then they decided that the public affairs team was supposed to produce programming on all the substantive issues in the relationship, so this included economics, environment, and, and, and.... There was no end to what you were supposed to produce, so you had to figure out how to be strategic. Political figures also loved to visit, mayors, governors, federal officials. Sometimes the ambassador would have multiple dinners going on at his residence at once, and I was often working events at the residence. The days were very long.

Q: Did you have the pressure of political correctness? I’m just wondering whether if you had a program you had to make sure that it wasn’t too New England white or something like that.

BERG: Most of my work was around the concept of inclusive societies. One of the projects I really loved that we were able to do was to bring the mural arts project of Philadelphia to join in making murals through a process of community engagement. It’s quite a powerful community engagement model where everybody gets involved in designing and producing a mural on a community building. We worked on that project and had three fabulous wall murals that went up in the suburbs of Paris, designed and painted with the young people from the communities.

Q: The suburbs of banlieue (banlieue, French for “suburb”, is often used to describe troubled suburban communities with a high proportion of residents from former French colonies) were the centers of Islamic migrants.

BERG: People who migrate in are likely to cycle through the suburbs because rent is more affordable.

Q: You were doing this from when to when?

BERG: 2007 to 2010.

Q: Can you give an idea of some of the other programs?

BERG: Sure! Jennifer Bullock, the ACAO, brought a great idea from Brazil to us, to have a youth ambassador program for young people from underserved communities and we worked with the French authorities to build that. And we also created an exchange on the topic of community organizing. We aimed to create positive ties with the U.S. for nontraditional leaders who might not have been approached for exchange programs in the past. I remember thinking at the time, I never would have been able to do a program like community organizing before Obama's election, but we had this leadership in the executive branch that gave us this kind of opportunity, since Obama was a community organizer himself.

We had a delegation of young leaders from the suburbs who went over to Chicago and learned how to community organize, participated in door-to-door organizing, went through a whole course and came back and started a community organizing movement in France that is still active. Those young leaders were really inspired by their interaction in the United States.

Q: Could you give an idea, for someone reading this in a different era, when we talk about community organization, what are we talking about?

BERG: We're really looking at nontraditional leaders who are making a difference in their communities. In France, for example, it's not so different from what we have here, but there's this phrase that's used, "the reproduction of elites." When you're reproducing elites, you're trying to have elites over time who are exactly the same as the elite person before them -- who look the same, sound the same, think the same, went to the same schools, did the same things. In this case, you're into something that the French call reproduction of elites, versus having a vital system that genuinely nurtures talent, diverse talent. We were trying to connect the U.S. with French leaders not only from the traditional elite, but also with those who were coming from non-traditional backgrounds. It was hard to break through in France as there can be bias in selection processes.

Q: And the school system in France is.... They say that the minister of education knows on what page every teacher throughout the world using the French text is working on. Of course, this is not a system that is designed for the teachers to tailor their program to the student body.

BERG: Yes, community organizing involves getting local residents to define and work for their own best interests, and gives people agency and belonging. In France, it used to be very difficult to break into traditional leadership if you were not from an elite family; maybe this is less of an issue these days. I was there at a special moment because I think people were optimistic and it was before the acceleration of terrorist attacks. When I was

there, the war in Syria hadn't started, the migration crisis had not intensified. I would have to identify it as a moment of optimism. Maybe the Obama win was part of that optimism about what can happen when we all work together. It was a moment in time. It was a really good time to be working there in the sense that you could help people make meaningful transatlantic connections, and also bring America's experience of inclusion to discussions. France welcomed Obama's election, and anti-Americanism was at a low.

Another project that I had was to inventory the French-U.S. cultural relationship. There was no central place, there was no cultural center, no U.S. cultural center, although, at some point, money was raised to start a U.S. cultural center. A building was erected with private funds, but not enough money was kept aside to actually have a cultural center. The building had to be turned over because there was no money to run it.

We attempted to create a virtual meeting space where the different organizations that were involved in the U.S.-French cultural relationship could keep abreast of each other's opportunities and collaborate. The density of our relationship is quite amazing. When you try to place yourself within it and say, "Where in this constellation of cultural relations does the embassy fit, and what can we contribute, where can we be most effective?" you have to do a capacity scan of what's already out there. Just doing that project brought so many surprises. Even a single university in France won't know within their own institution what all the relationships are that they have with the United States because the connections are so deep and wide. We're really close. One thing I take away from France is that we are so closely knit together. I don't worry too much about our friendship, though of course things can't be taken for granted.

Q: You were doing this at a time when the Internet was really coming to the fore and people could find out anything. Just type it in and there is perhaps your answer, or a bit of it. There's a lot of disinformation. How did you deal with it? Was the Internet part of your tools?

BERG: Well, we had people working with the French particularly on radicalization issues which are transnational and in part internet driven, but I was not working in that area.

As far as the internet goes, my effort was this virtual cultural center, the American center of France was a place where all the players.... There are many institutional players in a cultural relationship. It was a place where people could kind of find out what each institution was doing. It came to my mind in part because I was frustrated by redundancies. I would bring a speaker to France, but then you would find out that somebody else had just brought the same speaker a month before. Nobody knew what anybody else was doing and the relationships were just constant and very close, all of the United States and all of France so intimately connected.

It's like one big love letter between France and the U.S., despite moments of tension, there is so much history, family relationships, institutional relationships, young people constantly going back and forth. The French have a very large program of young Americans teaching in their public schools, teaching English in a one-year program, so

there are all the alumni of that exchange. There are sister cities. There's the Fulbright (The Fulbright U.S. Student Program offers fellowships for U.S. graduating college seniors, graduate students, young professionals and artists to study, conduct research, and/or teach English abroad.), which is just a small piece of this larger fabric. So then you have to ask yourself, am I doing something additive, or is this already being done? What is really needed to bring us closer? And at the time, the young people who didn't have access to transatlantic opportunities seemed like an important audience to bring aboard.

Then the individual university relationships – so many U.S. universities are present in France. Harvard has an amazing relationship with France, New York University has a very intense relationship, but it's not just the big colleges, it's everybody -- high schools, universities, and then institutions, non-profits, museums, and all the museum relationships. And scientific relationships, business relationships, in every area we are so close. When you come into that you have to ask yourself, what am I going to add and why is it important to do that? Otherwise, you're just wasting time. Of course, some of the institutions that want your involvement are exceedingly powerful, like the Louvre, or Science Po (Paris Institute of Political Studies), or these big places that say, let's work together on this or that. It was a balancing act.

Then again, we had our ambassador, and we had this fabulous ambassadorial residence. We had a Republican appointee, Craig Stapleton (Craig Roberts Stapleton), who was actually married into the Bush family. He was so energetic and truly loved France right down to the core. He'd go to numerous events in a night; it was almost like a game for him. He would get there before you – if you were his control officer, he'd already be there and he'd have this sparkle in his eye like he'd tricked you by getting there early. He was so active and so excited about the work; loved France. Then we had Ambassador Rivkin (Charles Rivkin), an Obama appointee coming out of the media entertainment industry, the son of an ambassador, so a second-generation ambassador. Paris tended to attract successful people.

Q: Did you find the disassemblment [sic] of U.S.I.A. (United States Information Agency, 1953-1999, a U.S. Agency devoted to public diplomacy), and turning it into public affairs inhibited you or was it working?

BERG: I missed USIA. When we merged, we were drawn into issues that weren't related to cultural ties. And Jim Bullock in Paris was put in a position of having to downsize. He also cared so much about France, and wouldn't have wanted to have to do what he had to do in order to address budget cuts. Understandably, this was difficult for the local staff. But that had been happening through much of my State career. I think I was at the State Department during a time when soft diplomacy budgets kept getting tighter, as well as the general budget. I'm all for investing in diplomacy, and we need to keep working on our advocacy for cultural outreach and diplomacy to be funded.

Q: Were you involved in these American Corners (The American Corners Program is a United States Department of State-sponsored initiative administering partner-supported

regional resource centers for information and programs highlighting American culture, history, current events, and government.) and libraries?

BERG: I did start an American Corner in the Slovak Republic. I opened an American Corner in Banská Bystrica (city in central Slovakia, capital of the region by the same name) with the help of U.S. Steel (an American integrated steel producer), which was located there at the time. The Corner was set in a few rooms of a beautiful old library building.

Q: How about in France?

BERG: In France, no. As discussed, France was a case of existing ample connectivity.

Q: You were there for how long?

BERG: Three years.

Q: Did you sense the French were receptive or were they difficult? It used to be that France was considered a rather standoff-ish place.

BERG: No, it wasn't like that. In my view, the French are wonderful, so interesting and nuanced, and in love with ideas. They appreciate creativity, and excel in so many areas. It's the most exciting country. I felt happy and productive there. At the time, it was also the only place on the planet where my husband and I both had relatives. We both had French relatives, mine cousins somewhat removed, through my father, and Karim, a first cousin who was practicing medicine there. We felt very at home in France.

Q: What was your husband doing?

BERG: My husband was working part-time at the embassy, but he was also running a cultural salon out of the house. Once a month he brought artists, musicians, writers, and it got to be quite the event, pretty much a place for intercultural exchange to happen. It was exciting.

Q: Were you running across problems with strict Islam at that point?

BERG: The problems were related to disempowerment, disenfranchisement, lack of opportunity, systemic discrimination – problems that we also have here in the United States. Radicalization was a big topic across Europe, but in my view, pressing issues were related to opportunity and access. Radicalization needed to be addressed of course, but that was in security portfolios, not in my area of responsibility. We have radicalization in different parts of the spectrum, also in terms of neo-Nazis etc.

Q: How did you find the response of universities to French students coming there and what were their reactions when they came back? Was this a happy mating? I'm thinking of French students going to...?

BERG: Going to the States? Yes. Oh, yes. It's a constant and the relationships are so well developed. There are a lot of young people who travel and have homestays in both directions. So, an American comes over and lives with a French family, or a French student goes over and lives with an American family. Those relationships last even over generations. I would meet people who were bringing their kids to meet their French host parents from the time when they went on their experience to live in France and so on. The affection is very deep. It's a relationship where, if we screw this one up, it would be truly against the odds, because we are so closely knit.

Q: Of course, there is always a section of the American body politic who view France with a great deal of suspicion. They view anybody, but the French are a little more flamboyant, so I think that attracts their attention. We're talking about people coming from very conservative communities. Did you find any problems like that?

BERG: I found a lot of World War history, veterans, families coming back, D-Day celebrations, a lot of pomp and circumstance, Holocaust remembrance. We had World War I, World War II, so a lot of times we would be called upon to go to graveyards, to commemorate, to be present. We have a lot of shared history, going back to Lafayette, and United Way stopped by to discuss its Lafayette Circle. We go back to the very founding of the United States. There's so much remembering to do. Then there truly are many families in the United States who have their roots in France. More recently, a lot of French are working in the United States. These days when you go to New York or San Francisco you hear French around you, young tech workers, finance workers, artists.

Q: Very heavily in the finance field.

BERG: Yes, in innovation, the arts, and tech. Very bright, and actually they have a very rigorous fantastic education system, really. It's such a special country.

Q: You were there for how long?

BERG: Three years.

Q: And then you left?

BERG: And then I left.

Q: What year did you leave?

BERG: I knew you were going to ask. I just have to walk backwards. That would be 2010.

Q: And then when you left what did you do?

BERG: And then I went on to Brussels. Brussels was my last overseas assignment.

Q: How was Brussels?

BERG: I went to Brussels to run the U.S.-European Media Hub (The Brussels Regional Media Hub is part of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Public Affairs and works to connect U.S. policy makers and experts with European media.). It was really an "out-of-skillset" assignment for me because it was running a TV studio for the U.S. Mission to the European Union. There were many American VIPs coming through Brussels, transiting all the time, it was a good place to conduct and share interviews. Somehow this idea had developed that we were going to bring Europe on board with our policies by disseminating media messages in the European media.

The European Union is powerful. Brussels housed three U.S. missions, it had three ambassadors – U.S. Ambassador to NATO, U.S. Ambassador to the European Union, and U.S. Ambassador to Belgium. The missions were heavy on older U.S. Foreign Service officers who were having their senior exposure at the European level through one of the three missions, and I was one.

Q: How did you find all of this in your work?

BERG: I was still I think very focused on everything related to inclusive leadership, a passion I brought with me. I had this studio at my disposal and I was conducting media training for officers there. I would also dispatch to missions and do media training for U.S. officials – their on-camera training, media training. But, at the same time, I had this studio to run and I could also do media training for rising young European leaders who were around the area. So, I did training for Roma leaders, I did training for diverse young leaders from across Europe in the studio. I guess I would have to say, by that time, my brain and my heart were so involved in these issues around inclusion. I enjoyed that more than trying to convince European leaders to step up more in Afghanistan – work I did of course, but did not enjoy. Or trying to persuade Europe to favor GMOs. I mean, the policies we were promoting at the time weren't so easy to sell.

I forgot to mention that in Paris we were asked by Embassy Kabul to host a delegation of Afghan women journalists, and they all disappeared, never went home to Afghanistan. Then believe it or not, the same thing happened in Brussels. Those were the years of our major investment in Afghanistan, and when I think about the present, I'm honestly glad for those women who got away.

It was great to be in Brussels and I learned so much about European institutions and Europe, the whole European Union, which is really different from a bilateral situation. I'm not sure when people got assigned to the bilateral missions if they really understood at that moment how influential Europe had become with the European Union. It was fascinating to be there.

I was there briefly and then I came home to work for our Special Representative to Muslim Communities on all the inclusion issues that I love the most. I was wrapping up

my career. That was towards the end. I worked for Farah Pandith (Special Representative to Muslim Communities, U.S. Department of State), back in the Department and put on a big event at the Department on “Diversity, Inclusion and U.S. Foreign Policy” and was starting to develop quite an extensive network in the area of inclusive leadership.

While I was with Farah, I also started a group called the Transatlantic Inclusion Leaders Network for rising young diverse political leaders from both sides of the Atlantic. We were looking for a permanent home for that project and I took the project on a detail over to the German Marshall Fund (a non-partisan American public policy think tank and grant-making institution) where I built the project out and I remained with the project. So, when I retired I stayed with the Transatlantic Inclusion Leaders Network and at the time of this interview, I just celebrated the fifth year anniversary of the network and have a powerful alumni network of young diverse elective leaders. I work on this project with Dr. Mischa Thompson of the U.S. Helsinki Commission. (note added: the network continued for a total of 10 years)

Q: The Marshall Fund really is not German-American.

BERG: It’s U.S.-European. Its goal is to strengthen transatlantic relations for the future.

Q: In Brussels were you seeing a change with more and more immigrants coming out of North Africa and all, which, in a way, has caused a lot of trouble in Europe? Was that going on while you were there or was that obvious?

BERG: The big wave of immigration was earlier, manpower recruited for factories and industry in Europe. A lot of these families are now multiple generations with generations fully brought up in the European system. I think in classrooms in Belgium you’re going to have the same kind of diversity you would have in Montgomery County (Maryland, U.S.) or in Fairfax County (Virginia, U.S.) They are hugely diverse, but the mentality of the leadership is way behind the reality of the classroom. Europe has an aging population and needs young people.

Q: In Belgium you’ve got Flemish and then throw in the other—

BERG: Europe is densely populated, and then, in terms of how many nations are carved up out of that continent, it’s made of all these small places and national identity is an issue, especially because borders moved so often in the course of history. Why is this a country? What makes a language a national language rather than a dialect? The European Union helps to deflect this kind of thing. It is hard and continuous work to construct a national identity. Who are we really? Do you consider the hierarchy of identities? When you think of who you are, what do you say first? At first do you say you’re American, do you say you’re Protestant? What comes to mind first? For different people, different things come to mind. But for the Belgians, what comes first? Belgian? European? Flemish? Walloon?

Q: I think Belgium is almost a unique case of uniting two different cultures and sitting on it for a long time without any problem and then all of a sudden it's bursting out again.

BERG: Well, I don't know that they didn't have problems before. It's a delicate balance. And then layered on, it has so many layers of government. There's no place with more governments than Belgium! And it's densely populated and it's a complex place; it also has a poor history regarding colonialism and racism. That said, it is enjoyable to live in Brussels. There is a lot of brain power there, and the European Union is a great project. I hope it holds together for the very long term.

Q: The colonial experience was not good.

BERG: No, and they haven't officially recognised that really, and, of course, this is an issue in France too, not teaching colonial history. In Belgium, they don't have museums that accurately portray what happened. It's complicated, but people there are so interesting. They're introspective and thoughtful about things and they are open to talking about issues of identity. I think it is headed in the right direction, as far as creating more social cohesion, at least in this regard.

Q: What did you find with the people you became friendly with? Would they talk to you about the problems of Belgium?

BERG: Yes. I still work with Belgians in my current job. It's been this wonderful journey – the thread runs through Brussels.

Q: You're certainly doing the work of the Lord.

BERG: I love the work that I do. All my work is based on inclusion. I feel like, when I look back, if I really went back to the beginning, from starting in the West Indies, where there is also a history of slavery and colonialism, moving over to North Africa, and going to Europe having that with me, and then coming back home, having friends involved in the civil rights efforts who joined me in the work we continue to do in Europe, I'm able to give coherence and it brings me joy.

Q: I think it's remarkable, with all the countries and problems you've had to deal with, you've kept your optimism.

BERG: I love the work I do. The one thing you really take away traveling around the world is that if people would work together, things would go better.

Q: Oh God, yes.

BERG: If people would be inclusive in the way that they govern and make decisions, then they would make better decisions. You come out of it all and think, we just have to move this idea forward around inclusion.

Q: We're going through a very difficult time right now, the election of 2016. The Republican candidate really is going back to the era of the "Know-Nothings" (the Native American Party, later renamed the American Party, anti-immigrant movement of the early to mid-1800s) of the early 1800s.

BERG: Why is he getting all this airtime? I wrote to NPR (National Public Radio) this morning. I sent a note to NPR this morning because when I listen to the morning broadcast there are so many soundbites of his voice saying these destructive things, and hardly a soundbite of his opponent. Even a liberal station feels compelled to play it over and over. Why enable him?

Q: The problem is that the media can be bought by outrageousness.

BERG: People are just fascinated by it, but by broadcasting it over and over, they're enabling.

Q: Then, after Brussels what?

BERG: So, it went Brussels, the special representative to Muslim communities back at State where I was doing this [project] building, then over to the German Marshall Fund.

Q: And what are you doing at that Fund?

BERG: I have retired from the Department of State. I retired and stayed with GMF in their leadership programs office. So I work for them now. I am in charge of their inclusive leadership endeavor for the transatlantic partners. I work to advance the practice of inclusive leadership on both sides of the Atlantic.

Q: Has the vote of the British to leave the European community caused problems?

BERG: It IS causing problems.

Q: It's stupid, but we're ready to have a stupid election, so we can't sit back and....

BERG: Especially for minorities. Some of that, whatever the negative energy was that made that vote pass, was rooted in xenophobia. It's a Pandora's Box.

Q: We're going through a difficult time, but I'm with you, not as enthusiastic as you are because I haven't been dealing with it, but still I'm optimistic that the good will squash those people. Unfortunately, there's an anti-feminine, anti-immigrant element, but on my part there's a class element. People who are doing this are a lower class -- this is a very dangerous thing for people in the Foreign Service to think everybody is kind of like, deal with your own kind and you don't really understand these people who are anti-black, anti-feminine, anti-elite.

BERG: In some countries in Europe, like in the Netherlands, I think they are prevailing in not letting their populist party succeed. But in the Netherlands, it's all in the family. Many people would have someone in their family who was in one of those populist parties. Here, hypothetically, I guess you could, but in those small countries you're going to be related to people who are on the other side of that political spectrum; brother, or sister, or brother-in-law, or nephew is in that party, so they get the discussion going at the dinner table. I think people are listening to each other. You don't get the situation where you wouldn't have heard different expressions. You have the opportunity to interact and to talk about these things. We can't solve any of this without talking to each other, right?

Q: I think that's the real problem. People aren't talking to each other.

BERG: I've worked a few times with an artist in Germany, Mo Asumang, who made it her work for some time, this amazing woman. Her mom is white German and her dad from Africa, but her mother's elders were Nazis. Mo has all of this inside her. She's made movies. A lot of her work is to counter neo-Nazism. She engages neo-Nazis, she'll go up to young people and talk to them, sit with them and try to work through with them why they are saying what they're saying.

Here in the United States, when she was making her film, she did some interviews with the Ku Klux Klan. She called them and said she was from German television and did they want to talk to her, and, of course, they said yes because she was with German television. Then, she shows up and she's black. She does the interviews and you can see right on camera how people respond to her, how she talks to them, and how she brings the conversation around. She's so brave. She engages. When I talk to her, she says we have to engage. There's a role for everybody, but for her, that's her role.

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

End of interview