Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Information Series

ROBIN BERRINGTON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: April 13, 2000

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Berrington.]

Q: Today is April 13, 2000. This is an interview with Robin Berrington. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Robin, could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family.

BERRINGTON: I was born October 17, 1940 in Cleveland, Ohio. My father was a manufacturer's representative which is just a fancy term for salesman. My mother was a housewife. I had one brother. I guess you could call us very typical mid-western, middle class white family.

Q: What about your father and mother's education?

BERRINGTON: My father and mother both came from lower class backgrounds. They both went to high school, but they themselves had absolutely no college experience at all, nor in fact did they have any foreign experience at all, except for the odd one day trip into Mexico from Arizona or the other side of Niagara Falls. No trans oceanic trips.

Q: Where were you in Cleveland, I mean as a kid what was your home area?

BERRINGTON: Well, I was born in the eastern part of Cleveland and grew up in Shaker Heights, Ohio, which was I guess the middle class to affluent part of town, nice residential area. Then, when we were, gosh I must have been about five, six, seven, I don't recall for sure, we moved to the west side of Cleveland which was similarly middle class

to affluent, although not quite as old fashioned and established as the eastern side of Cleveland was.

Q: Where did you go to school in the elementary school?

BERRINGTON: Elementary school was in Shaker Heights, and then junior high was in Rocky River which was in the northwestern part of Cleveland. Then my brother was not exactly the world finest scholar and tended to be a bit of a troublemaker around town, so my parents sent him off to military school in Tennessee by the name of Castle Heights Military Academy. As the younger brother I was always very skeptical about my brother getting preferential treatment, so I said. "If he is going, I want to go too," although my grades and school behavior were perfectly fine. So I also went off to the Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon, Tennessee. So from the eighth grade on, I wore a uniform and played toy soldier for the following five years.

Q: Well, normally it is if you don't behave, we will send you to military school in those days particularly. Did you know what you were getting into?

BERRINGTON: Not really, but when I looked at the catalogue, it had a swimming pool and it had very stylish buildings, something out of King Arthur's Camelot, you know crenellated roofing and all that. Again, because he was getting it, I wanted it too. So off I went. My brother was very unhappy there, and I loved it. Those were five of the most fun years I had.

Q: Well, just before you went there, while you were in elementary and junior high and all, what sort of studies or activities grabbed you?

BERRINGTON: At that point, virtually nothing. I think when you are in primary and junior high, not much could grab you. As far as extra curricular activities, they really took hold of me at the military school because they offered far more activities as well. I mean, for example, I was the yearbook editor. I was the number three ranking cadet which was sort of among things for the good student. I was the deputy editor of the newspaper. I was on the track team. I was the leader of the band, the drum major. When the faculty leader was not there, I was the one who directed the band. So I was involved in a lot of things. It was a great time.

Q: What about academics at the school?

BERRINGTON: Well, it was in the south. Military schools in the South tended to be more academically prestigious than similar military schools in the North at that time. It had a pretty good program. My only language experience was really at Castle Heights, where everybody else was taking French or Spanish, I took Latin for the five years I was there. I guess mainly because I was interested in language and the derivation of English words and so on. Of course, there was the usual world history and that kind of thing, but it was I suppose a typical high school education in every other respect.

Q: In Cleveland at home or when you were back from Castle Heights how aware were you of the world around you? These would be the years of McCarthyism or the Korean War or subjects like that. Was there any discussion of these things?

BERRINGTON: No, not really. My parents were very mid-western middle class in that respect. Not that they had any disdain for that sort of thing, but they were not terribly engaged. But there were a few things when I think back that must have kind of planted some seeds that took awhile to blossom. I can remember when I was very young, just a memory than sort of a real, just a vague memory. My parents took in a Japanese exchange student. She lived with us only for a year, but she served the purpose for their intentions, of providing baby-sitting, sort of like an au pair sort of thing, but she happened to be Japanese. This must have been 1945 or '46. Right after the war. I am not even sure what kind of a program she was on. My parents were not church goers so it wasn't a church thing.

Q: I would be very dubious there would even be a program then.

BERRINGTON: Exactly, and as I say, I vaguely remember this, so I can't give you more detail about it. The other thing which is again a kind of vague memory, my father provided us with a good life, but he was not the world's greatest businessman. One of the things he did was, he got into a cooperative venture with some friends, and they ran a Swedish restaurant. So I can remember going down like Saturday or Sunday as a kid eating all these for me weird things like pickled herring and all these other things.

Q: Like Lutefisk.

BERRINGTON: Yes, the sort of stuff in a Swedish smorgasbord and menu. I can also remember they were members of something called the Cleveland Athletic Club which was a kind of socially prestigious thing in those days. They were very friendly with a woman who was the honorary Dutch counsel in Cleveland. I think it was more that she and my mother were on the same bowling team than anything else. I can't imagine they talked foreign affairs with my parents who as I say, were very indifferent to anything overseas. These three things strike me as kind of early kind of indications that there would be something foreign in my life down the road.

Q: How about the Cleveland Plain Dealer. It is supposed to be quite a good paper.

BERRINGTON: It was, and the man who published the paper, his name was Louie Seltzer, was in fact a friend of my father's largely through the bowling team. [Editor's Note: Louis B. Seltzer was editor of the Plain Dealer's competition, the afternoon Cleveland Press for thirty-eight years.] But again I just can't imagine my father talking anything foreign affairs and not that much in terms of local affairs except how that would affect him as a businessman or taxes or property values or whatever. Those were the important things to him.

Q: Well, while you were at Castle Heights, did you get a lot of history anything on political science or civics?

BERRINGTON: Yes, the usual. Nothing worth citing. The program was good, but it wasn't extraordinary. It wasn't that either. Probably the only thing there that might have sparked an interest was it was a school that had a large number of students from Central and South America. These were largely sons of very wealthy, I'm sure, politically well connected families.

Q: Top ten families of the Dominican Republic or Guatemala.

BERRINGTON: Precisely. My brother, his room mate was from Honduras, but these were kids who wanted to be more American than they wanted to be Honduran. You didn't sit around and talk about Central America and South America politics and culture. You talked about girls, sports, whatever.

Q: In my interviews, I have found that if you wanted to have what was the main thing in high school that prepared male foreign service officers in the early stage, it would be girls and sports.

BERRINGTON: But this was a boys school of course. It has since become co-ed and a couple of years ago it has since closed down. Military schools have become less and less necessary. Let's face it, they were places that a lot of people sent their kids to when their schools were integrated, and they didn't want their kids going to a school with blacks. But once that issue died away, I think the need for military schools, or most of them, dwindled.

Heights was really an important experience for me because I guess it helped to build up a certain confidence whether it was in music or journalism or even academics, or even leadership. It also there were a couple of teachers there who were really key influences on me. One of them was the headmaster. He was the graduate of Wesleyan University in Connecticut. So when I left Heights, when I graduated from Heights, I applied to a number of schools. Wesleyan was where I landed. It was always my first choice. I will explain later, Wesleyan in many respects was the seminal experience, so Heights was kind of the stepping stone that made it possible for me to go to Wesleyan. There was also a professor of geometry which is sort of beside the point, but the fact that he was the advisor to the school newspaper and yearbook brought us into close contact. He was a curiosity for a small town in Tennessee, Lebanon Tennessee. He was a very sophisticated guy. He may have helped to start broadening my outlook on a lot of things. The third person was a professor of English who really kind of developed my sense of learning and good literature, and a lot more than just American and British literature, but in translation good French or German literature.

Q: But there is a theme here of publishing, I mean of the yearbook, the newspaper and all that which on can probably draw a certain line between that and what you did later on.

BERRINGTON: Certainly involving kind of public affairs if you will. Because I rose to become the number three ranking cadet, I guess there you would say was a small circle of us, five or six of us, that the way military schools operate, there is a little group that tends to run things. I was in that circle, so it was good for the ego.

Q: So you would have graduated there 1958 or so? What attracted you to Wesleyan College.

BERRINGTON: 1958 exactly. Wesleyan University in Connecticut. So I went off to Wesleyan. You know you talk about fate, you always wonder how these things work, if there is some sort of kismet out there. I went off to Wesleyan and I was enrolled as a pre-med student, and you know like everybody else, pre-med or something like that exciting and glamorous and all that. I will never forget the first day I was at one of the required courses. I don't know if you remember that but then they had required courses.

One of the required courses was something called western civilization. Not only did all incoming students have to take it, but also all new professors had to teach it. We got into our class which was about 20 kids. The professor said, "Hello, my name is David Abosch, and I am a new professor here, and I am required to teach this course, and I don't know a bloody thing about western civilization. My own field happens to be Japanese studies, and whether you guys like it or not, you are going to get eastern civilization," which we did. I after that it was all history for me. He is without question the man that really pointed me in the East Asian in general and Japan in particular.

Q: What was his background?

BERRINGTON: He was a scholar of Japanese history, a young professor. I think that may have been his first job. He moved on to another school, and I lost touch with him. But he was a very charismatic, very dynamic guy. It wasn't just me, there was the whole, about five or six of us that kind of got the bug from him. So after one year of eastern civilization instead of western civilization, the second year he offered for the first time in Wesleyan's history a beginning course in Japanese language. I thought, I was taking German at the time because you had to take a language and the usual offerings were German, French, Spanish, Italian. I can't remember now. But I didn't want to be like everybody else. I guess when you are slightly shorter as I am, and shall we say athletically challenged like I am. You look for other ways to distinguish yourself rather than being the sports hero. You want to do something different, and the idea of doing Japanese really, it could have been Chinese. It could have been Korean, but the idea of doing that really interested me. So there were four of us that took that beginning Japanese course. That was the sophomore year. Then after that first year, I don't know how he did it, but our junior year, he offered another series of Japanese courses, Japanese history. By the time my senior year came around, he was still there and he had managed to convince the university

that they were going to set up a Japanese studies program, not just in language but in history, language, literature. He was still the only guy there. This was in the '60s when universities maybe more willing to consider alternative study programs, and in so doing this he told them that three of the kids from that first course, me and two others, we would go to Japan, spend a year studying Japanese in Japan, come back and become proctors or teaching assistants or something in this program which would bring us back the year after our senior year and coming back and serving as proctors or teaching assistants would enable us to pay off the university for the money the university was going to give us, "Weren't they?" That is how he must have put it to them.

Well I got close to a $3000 scholarship which in those days was a lot of money, to go to Japan. My senior year was spent in Japan living with a Japanese family in Tokyo, studying the Japanese language every day at small language school called [Editor's Note: sounds like] "Kotsago Yukai" which is still there, with the other two students from Wesleyan. You know, it was my first time overseas, and that is what kind of got me going on the international front.

Q: What was your academic major, political science?

BERRINGTON: No, I was a history major. I had long since dropped pre-med. I think, me and chemistry, me and physics just didn't get along. I knew that I was going to be more of a social studies type, so history seemed an excellent kind of thing. In fact, after the year in Japan, I came back for the year afterwards where we were supposed to be teaching assistants, and as it turned out, the University had second thoughts. Apparently not as many students applied for the course as they hoped would, so they dropped the whole idea. By that time after Abosch had moved on to greener pastures, we came back and literally had nothing to do. So in effect, we got that scholarship for nothing, did not have to pay it back or work. But I did do a graduation report, thesis, whatever you want to call it which was using Japanese sources. By that time I was able to read and write. I think it was the first such thesis that had ever been done especially in using Asian original language source material. That was why Wesleyan was so important to me.

Q: Well what was your impression of Japan?

BERRINGTON: This had been 1961. Well, it was quite an exotic place. I always like to say you measure events in Japan BO and AO; that is before the Olympics and after the Olympics. The Olympics were in 1964, and that is when Japan kind of opened the world after the war. This was, as I say BO, before the Olympics. It was quite an interesting place. I had never been in anything like that before. Living with a Japanese family; it was a very curious arrangement. This was a very middle to low class family. In fact we had advertised in the newspapers. I mean the other students and myself, we had advertised in the newspapers that we were American students, because you always wanted to emphasize the American connection in Japan. We were American students who needed a place to live. We would be there for a year, so the three of us got three separate places. The place I was, there were the family lived downstairs, but upstairs they had three or

four bedrooms, and they opened them up to students. I was the only foreign student there, and the other students were Japanese. So I got sort of the best of both worlds. On the one had I was invited downstairs to be with the family because I was sort of the showcase foreigner, and the four Japanese students didn't get that sort of treatment as I did, but they seemed to deal with that easily enough. But yet I could also go out and do things with my peer students, hang around, drinking, carousing, and things that Japanese students did in those days. It was a very influential experience for me, and what I often said was that my usefulness as a foreign service officer, my ability to deal with the Japanese, my awareness of how to operate in that society was much greater than, this doesn't sound very humble, but was much greater because I had that kind of hands-on experience rather than the rather formal exposure you get at say FSI (Foreign Service Institute).

Q: Oh, yes. You don't have the immersion. I mean most people take the course during the day and then they are back at home having to deal with family crises in English.

BERRINGTON: Exactly. But when I went home, I went home to a Japanese experience. I spoke Japanese literally all day long and all night long, and entertaining on weekends again was all in Japanese. The other two Wesleyan students had similar experiences, and in fact we made a point of not really getting together a lot. We wanted to, not avoid each other, but just socialize with the other. So everything stemmed from that.

Q: Well, did you get a solid feeling of Japanese society, I mean where people were in the social structure and all that?

BERRINGTON: Oh yes. I mean if you are a foreign student in a place like Tokyo where people are very kind of schizoid in the way they deal with you, as Japan is. I mean on the one hand they can be very embracing and extremely welcoming, but on the other hand they can be keeping you at arms length. It for me was a very good experience to start my study of Japan. It didn't answer all the questions, of course not. There was still a lot. In fact, what it really told me, what it really opened the door for was “OK I know this but look at all this I don't know and that I don't understand,” and that is what I really, why I considered the experience so important because it really put me on the road to wanting to know more about Japan and why things were the way they were.

Q: Was the school basically for language or were you exposed to the literature, culture and all that, or was that an aside?

BERRINGTON: Well the official program at the language school was language, but of course if you are living in Tokyo and if you are a young person interested in the arts as I was from an early age. I mentioned before I was not good at sports. In fact as a very young kid I broke my jaw and was not allowed to play certain kinds of sports. So from very early on I started taking piano lessons, developed an interest in music. I mentioned I was director of the school band. I was always was interested in the visual arts. I liked going to museums. So cultural affairs was something I was always keen on. In a place like Tokyo where here was a whole world of culture, I went to the Kabuki theater; I went

to art galleries; I did everything I could to learn more about this strange new society and culture that I was living in.

Q: While you were doing this were you thinking of what you might do with it?

BERRINGTON: No, not at all. In fact what I knew I was going back next year to become a teaching assistant, which I told you fell through once we got there. So as far as I was concerned I was just looking to going back next year and maybe I should push on because this is all wrapped up together. I went back and then another important event occurred. Again I talk about fate and all, but I guess all our lives, yours as much as mine have these crazy events that kind of define. We may not be aware of it but it does lead to other things we may not be sure about. My father became very sick. I had already applied to law school, because if you are a bright young, kind of achieving type from a school like Wesleyan, you go to law school. You go to medical school; you go to law school; you do something that is going to point you into an academic or really prestigious white collar career. I applied to law school, and was accepted at Yale. Yale was a very expensive place, and when my father got sick, being self employed he didn't have quite the insurance that we needed, so that literally ate up all the family money. I didn't have a scholarship from Yale so Yale told me if you don't have the money, we will put off your acceptance for another year so that you can work and build up some money. In the meantime, I thought what am I going to do for a year, and along came something called the Peace Corps. I applied to the Peace Corps, and they said, "Is there anyplace I wanted to go?" I said, "No place in particular, but I would like to go to East Asia and if possible as close to Japan as you could find something." Literally within a few months I was accepted into the Thai program. When I went off to Thai Peace Corps training, my father was just getting out of the hospital. Yale was receding quickly as an option. So I went into Thailand and into the Peace Corps training at the University of Indiana which was a summer long intensive, very intensive Thai language and area studies program. From that I wound up in Thailand for two years from 1963-'65.

Q: How did you find the Peace Corps training?

BERRINGTON: A mixed bag. The language was fabulous. The language training was outstanding. They had a bunch of Thai exchange students. It was put together by a well known American linguist of Thai experience. Her name was Mary Hoss. It was just an outstanding program. The rest of the program was kind of a mixed bag because that was the early days of Peace Corps. In fact when we were just group six of the Peace Corps. I think they were still feeling their way around and not quite sure how to do it. There were 60 of us, and we were all in an English language teaching program, what they called TEFL, teaching English as a foreign language. Am I giving you too much detail?

Q: No you are not. I want to capture this seminal experience. The Peace Corps, begun under the Kennedy administration, was considered one of its crown jewels, a way tapping the youth of America. How did you find your fellow Peace Corps and the spirit and all that?

BERRINGTON: In those days, there were clearly two groups of Peach Corps kids. There were the generalists like myself or there were the technical types. The technical types might have been kids with farming backgrounds or engineering backgrounds or something that gave them a specific skill to do overseas, dig sewage systems, or develop new ways to treat malaria, or provide farming techniques a country could adopt. But those of us, and of course this was in the days of idealism was still a major part of the Peace Corps. In those days the generalists, they didn't know quite what to do with him or her so we were put into these cattle programs teaching English as a foreign language and sent overseas in effect to teach English in high schools. This was fine with me because it got me overseas and got me back, if not close, to Japan, at least it got me to Asia. But there were 60 of us, and all of us were generalists. All of us were basically young bachelor of arts or liberal arts kids from New England prestigious schools like Wesleyan or Harvard or whatever to you know some of them from very typical small church schools in the mid-west or larger state schools on the west coast or whatever. I mean there was quite a mixed bag but we were all generalists, and we were all young and fired up.

Q: How much of a presence was Sargent Shriver when you were getting training?

BERRINGTON: Nothing. He was in Washington. We were in Indiana. You know, Sargent Shriver, Who is he? We didn't join because of him. The first time I met Shriver was at a meeting in Bangkok a year into the program when he was passing through and the Peace Corps office said any of you want to come to Bangkok to meet the director come on in. But no he was a minimal presence.

Q: Well when you got to Thailand where did they send you?

BERRINGTON: They sent me to a small town called Kamphaeng Phet. It was about halfway between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, sort of where the central plain meets the north. I was the first Peace Corps volunteer to ever go there, and I was the only Peace Corps volunteer in that town. A lot of the kids said they wanted to be with somebody else. A lot of the kids said they didn't want to be pioneers. I wanted to have as stark an experience as possible, so I asked to be the first one in the area.

It was a pretty undeveloped little town. It was a provincial capital. It had electricity only at night. My water was drawn from a well in the backyard. The school had assigned two students to live with me to make sure I didn't kill myself or something. I mean the embarrassment of having the first volunteer in your town to you know, get in trouble would have been, you know, not to have him shoot himself. So it was you know as probably as typical a Peace Corps experience at least in terms of what the public thought the Peace Corps experience was like. I taught school every day with a bunch of Thai students. It was a boy's school, a secondary boy's school. I taught like ninth, tenth, eleventh grade, actually just ninth and tenth because my school was not as advanced enough to have eleventh and twelfth grade yet. I spent two years doing that. The interesting thing about that period is that about once every four months, three four, five

months on a kind of a regular basis, some guy, a foreigner would show up in my town, set up a big screen, show movies, pass out booklets, and provide entertainment. The second or third time that this happened, I asked who this guy was. It turned out he was the USIS (U.S. Information Service) person from Chiang Mai who traveled through various prefectures now and then to show his movies and sort of wave the USIS flag. That was my first exposure to USIS and their operation.

Q: Well had the foreign service raised any blip on your radar? May be when you were in Japan?

BERRINGTON: No not at all. If anything, you have got to remember, it was the 60's. I was young. Even though my upbringing in Ohio and Tennessee was extremely conservative, by the time Wesleyan finished with me I was fairly liberal. The last thing I wanted to be doing was sashaying overseas with a bunch of cookie pushers in pin striped pants, you know the fascists in the embassy, are you kidding? No I didn't want to be doing that. As Peace Corps volunteers we went out of our way to avoid them, and when we went to embassy events if we were invited or something was involved, we always stood in the background and made a point of making ourselves as obnoxious as possible. I am sure I was a pain in the ass.

Q: Interesting. I was with the board of examiners in 1975-76, and I had had a certain prejudice against the Peace Corps. I never had much experience with the Peace Corps, and I thought these are a bunch of sort of radical kids who are going out there and living it up or having a good time anyway, and make lousy foreign service types. Yet I had my prejudices ripped away because they did very well on the foreign service exam.

BERRINGTON: OK, we overlapped. I was at BEX in '76. By the time I was at BEX I was probably on the other side of the fence. I would get more and more of those guys in there. So Peace Corps was my first introduction to USIS, my first introduction to sort of living in a third world type of situation, and my first time where I was really on my own working. In Japan I was a student, I was living with a family, it was somewhat different.

Q: Well were you getting a different feel for Thai society than Japan, because you were right in the guts of the business?

BERRINGTON: Sure. I became rather notorious in my Peace Corps group because my headmaster and I didn't get along at all. He was very much involved in petty corruption and mismanagement of school funds. I really, being young and everything was black and white, I was very disapproving. I complained about this so much, you know, when you are a Peace Corps volunteer you are backed by the governor and other people. I am not sure volunteers do today, but in those days we did. I think I have a large part to do with getting him transferred out and a new headmaster in. The new headmaster was terrific. But yes, I became aware of how corruption makes things work. The other important part of the Peace Corps work was you were actually living and working with people who were not of your own value system or own traditions. You had to make compromises; you had

to make adjustments of your own. Those of us who were in the Peace Corps and moved on to the foreign service, I think many of us admitted, and this has almost become a rite of passage or something, we still carried the Peace Corps mentality with us to our foreign service work which created problems as well as opportunities to the more traditional style of foreign service operation.

Q: What as a teacher, how were these Thai boys approaching their study? Did you find them motivated, driving, lackadaisical?

BERRINGTON: Certainly more closer to lackadaisical than motivated. I mean if you are a young Thai boy whose mother and father may not even be able to read and write, and the highest grade you can go to is the tenth grade, what are your job opportunities after that? You go back and farm or you go back and take over your father's small job. What is the value of learning English? For them it was a joke. My main responsibility was keeping them entertained rather than teaching the rudiments of a foreign language they would have for about a half a year.

Q: Did you find you were striking sparks with any of the students?

BERRINGTON: Yes, I was, of course. In fact they often say if you have an impact on one person in your life you have really done well. Well, there was one kid that I clearly must have had some kind of impact on because he was one of the two that lived with me at that time. After he graduated he had come back to school, he went on to a teacher training school which was more prestigious among Thais and more likely to lead him to a better lifestyle. Then by the time I left Thailand, he went from the teacher training school to university. He was the first student from that province, not family or town but from the whole province. He was the first student from that prefecture to ever go to university in Bangkok. He then following graduation from Thammasat University, which was one of the two prestigious schools, he got a job with Bank of Commerce. So I cannot help but think all that might not have gotten together if he had just not had the experience of living there because I was pushing and urging these kids to do things. I can remember one time I took the class; I had one class that I was kind of like the homeroom teacher. I took the class to Bangkok which was the first time many of these kids had ever been to Bangkok. It was just a quick overnight. I remember going out to the airport, and they had never even seen an airplane before. So I opened the doors, or shall we say, expanded their horizon, in terms of what these kids had experienced. It is not just me; it could have been any other Peace Corps volunteer.

Q: What were the parent's reactions? Were you getting...

BERRINGTON: I seldom ever saw them. In a provincial high school like that, many of the parents live in other villages way out. Onetime this particular student, the one that I helped, he took me out to his village which was about two hours out of our town and I met his parents. We talked and had a nice couple of hours had lunch together. That was the only time I saw them. We didn't talk academic issues.

Q: Well you were doing this 1963-'65. Did you get to the embassy at all or have any...

BERRINGTON: At the risk of sounding repetitive "Are you kidding?" The only time we got to the embassy I think was for that Shriver meeting. And as I say we had absolutely nothing we wanted to do in Bangkok.

End of Tape 1, Side A
Start of Tape 1, Side B

Q: Now you finished your Peace Corps tour in 1965. Did you have any plans by then?

BERRINGTON: You have got to remember the Vietnam War is starting to heat up. America was getting more and more radical, and we were part of the crowd that was...

Q: You were saying your parents said to you...

BERRINGTON: My parents said to me one time it is too bad I went to Wesleyan and the Peace Corps because that is where I became a Communist. That's why this idea of socializing with the embassy, no way.

Nevertheless, by 1965 I knew I wanted to get back into academia, so I applied to a number of schools and was accepted at Harvard, and went back to Harvard and studied Japanese. I was at Harvard for two years in the language immersion program. It was…I cannot remember how to describe what a contrast it was to go from a place like a crude village in Thailand back to Harvard, your kind of pristine academic venue. Most of the students I was dealing with at Harvard were convinced that I was in the CIA. In those days, Peace Corps, a lot of people even though it was supposed to be radical, all thought we were from the undercover or something.

Q: There had been a series of exposés by Ramparts and other magazines you know I mean of all sorts of things where there was CIA money, it was just spreading it around.

BERRINGTON: Never with the Peace Corps.

Q: I know, but I am saying it was part of the atmosphere of the times.

BERRINGTON: Yes, definitely that atmosphere. And of course the other thing, and here I am going to reveal some prejudices, I was absolutely shocked and appalled at how narrow minded and cloistered the academic types were particularly the graduate program in schools like Harvard. Although my two years at the Harvard graduate program were wonderful years, I enjoyed it very much and was glad to be studying and all that, I was getting probably equally disillusioned with the atmosphere, the formality, the lack of flexibility, the total indifference toward anything outside of their very narrow academic fields.

So while I was well into my second year, I was getting more and more unsure of what I was going to do, when I got a telephone call from a representative of the USIS. USIS said what with the Vietnam War and national interest focused in Southeast Asia, they were expanding their Thai program, and they were trying to recruit people who had Thai experience. One of the sources they had was a list of people who had been Peace Corps in Thailand. Would I be interested in going back and becoming a USIS staff officer in Thailand up-country? That was the key word, “up country.” I must have given it about three minutes thought and I said, "Sure." So I came down to Washington. I remember USIS, or USIA I should say, paid for me to come to Washington. I had like an oral interview, and was accepted into the program. This was in I guess maybe February of 1968.

Q: Before we move to that, I would just like to ask what were you studying at Harvard?

BERRINGTON: Well again, because I'd had what I call field experience, and my interest tended to be more now, what is going on now, what is happening now. Even when I was studying Japanese at Wesleyan, I was not that interested in the Medieval or the march to 19th and 20th century politics and developments. But everything at Harvard was pretty much classically oriented, historically oriented, even literature. Much of the language I got, well, what they were doing was preparing you for a Ph.D. program, and a Ph.D. program requires a lot of this really orthodox classical background in language, history and whatever. That was part of it. I frankly was not interested in that. I kept I suppose being rather difficult in saying, “hey when are we going to modernize?” “When are we going to do something that is relevant to current affairs and what happens today?” My seminar leader was Ed Reischauer who was a former ambassador to Japan. I guess this was a bit of an eye opener as well. We all had to choose subjects for the seminar. I chose Thai-Japanese relations in W.W.II, because it was a field that was pretty wide open. Reischauer in so many words said I don't know anything about Thailand, and I am not sure anybody in this department knows anything about that period, so if you want to study it, fine, but you are not going to get much support in class. I thought, Hmmm, this is the attitude of the great guru of Japanese studies? It was very disagreeable. You know, as I say, because so many of the people there were interested in such arcane issues as how much rice was imported or exported from Yokohama in the year 1872-1873. I just didn't see myself as part of that.

I tended to socialize much more with those kids who were like myself maybe. We were a little bit older because we had Peace Corps experience, didn't just come off the conveyor belt straight through. We were a little bit older; we had some overseas experience already, and we tended to be what we felt was a little more practical and realistic about these current affairs. So even though I had a great time, I loved it and was able to study lots of things in art or literature that I had not studied, I enjoyed it. I was…as a career, as a continuing issue for me, it became less and less a practical alternative.

Q: I think the Peace Corps, among other things, brings you to the real world in ways that you never would get out of Academia.

BERRINGTON: Yes, you have expressed it much better that I did. So you see when USIA called up one day and said, "How would you like to come back to Thailand and be a staff officer up country?" It was a very tempting offer.

Q: Did you see this offer as part of the greater effort in Vietnam and that Vietnam was bad?

BERRINGTON: Yes, it was put in those terms. National interest in Southeast Asia. You will be part of the team trying to turn back the Communist tide and all that. Certainly that was part of it. Yet, even though I had become far more liberal than my family, even though I had become far more sensitive to trends, political issues and all of that, I guess you would say I was a believer in the Vietnam War. .

Q: Do you recall any of the questions you were asked on the oral exam?

BERRINGTON: Not at all. It wasn't the sort of BEX oral exam that you and I used. It was an ad hoc kind of thing just for people going to Thailand. There was no Thai language test.

Q: They knew you had experience there so they could put you in the field.

BERRINGTON: Well, after, at the end of our Peace Corps experience we took an FSI test in Thai believe it or not, and I scored a 3.3. You know, as far as they were concerned I had in their eyes the necessary credentials, and that was the thing.

Q: Well, was their any family to be considered, a significant other or anything?

BERRINGTON: No significant other. I had some very close friends in the Peace Corps that had become even closer. In fact two of them went to Harvard at the same time. That wasn't the reason; it was just coincidence that we were there at Harvard. I had kept up with some others in the Peace Corps who were very close. By this time in all fairness I would have to say my family and I were growing more and more distant. They had long since had come to grips with the idea that I was going to be working and living overseas and doing something totally alien to them. When I said Peace Corps, when I said USIS, they probably thought it was harebrained and crazy, but they knew they couldn't stop me.

Q: So you went over in '68? Was there much training before you went over?

BERRINGTON: None at all. I mean literally I went in to Washington, took about maybe a week of signing in, meeting people, but no organized training. Then I found myself on a plane to Bangkok, and after a few days there were kind of checking in at the embassy and

then just about the time I was getting over jet lag, I was assigned to a place called Sakon Nakhon which is in the Northeast.

Q: Well you were in Thailand from when to when?

BERRINGTON: The very beginning of '68 through the summer of '69.

Q: Now that you are in the field were there an equivalent to mentors or somebody that was going to show you the ropes or were you sort of thrown in there?

BERRINGTON: Well in those days, and I guess we are really starting the foreign service experience. I should preface that by saying I was not a foreign service officer. I was not what they called an FSO in those days. I wasn't even what they called an FSIO, a foreign service information officer. I was an FSL. Do you remember that designation?

Q: They keep changing.

BERRINGTON: Foreign service limited which meant I had in effect a two year appointment just for Thailand. Okay, I was young still and two years was a long way off. So I arrived in Bangkok and went up country to take up my post in Sakon Nakhon. As far as having a mentor or any kind of supervisor, he was in Sakon Nakhon. What we were assigned as, there was a radio station in northeast Thailand. It was set up to broadcast counterinsurgency news and information to help the Thai government tell its story to the Thai people, particularly in those areas where the counterinsurgency was strongest, and the northeast was that area.

Q: Who were the insurgents?

BERRINGTON: The communists.

Q: But native Thai?

BERRINGTON: Native Thai plus a large number of Vietnam. The Vietnamese had cadre in northeast Thailand at that time because northeast Thailand contains a large Vietnamese minority. The Vietnamese people are, of course, one of the major people in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese community was very strong in northeast Thailand. Not in Bangkok or in other parts of the country, so they provided a kind of a natural conduit for any infiltration or whatever the communist Vietnamese from Vietnam might have wanted to push in northeastern Thailand. Then of course, Northeastern Thailand is as you know right on the border with Laos. The northeastern Thai is probably ethnically closer with, linguistically, customs everything, to the Lao than they are to the central plains Thai. That was another reason why the border was very porous and people came back and forth. There was the Mekong River. I used to go back and forth on the Mekong to Laos all the time without a passport, so it was easy for anybody else to do as well. So the program we

were helping, that USIS Bangkok was helping, was the Thai government's efforts to try and get better control over this insurgency movement.

There was a Thai communist party as well, and there were Thai CP member operatives up there. That was one of the interesting things, who was running the show? The Vietnamese coming through Vietnam or the Thais who were supposed to be nominally in charge? The town where I was stationed was sort of a headquarters for the Royal Thai Government's efforts in that area. There was a large Thai army presence. There was a large American presence. There was my supervisor who actually was the top guy at this radio station. There was a colleague of mine who also had been in the Peace Corps Thailand and was recruited just like me. There was a CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) official there. There was an AID (Agency for International Development) official there. They all had families, wives, children, and of course there was a large Thai government presence. So it was a kind of a mix of a community there for this tiny town in the northeast.

Q: What was your USIS structure there?

BERRINGTON: Well, oh and I forgot, there was a BPAO (Branch Public Affairs Officer) as well. The BPAO (branch public affairs officer) did your routine USIS work, running around showing movies, meeting with officials, sending in reports to Bangkok, you know, what BPAO's do almost any place. We who were assigned to this radio station were supposed to be working with Thai counterparts to go around into the countryside to collect news, to get these reports which we would then turn into radio commentary and kind of on the scene, you know, interviews which were then edited and then turned into radio broadcasting, which was then broadcast all over the northeast. I guess you would say we were supposed to be the advisors to the Thai guys in trying to encourage them to do more timely, relevant, up to date programming on what the Thai government was doing on behalf of the people.

Q: How did that work? How did you feel our sort of working with the Thais worked?

BERRINGTON: Well the Thais are a very relaxed, fun loving people. I know that sounds like a generalization, but I think it is fairly accurate, and we tended to be much more disciplined, more work oriented than they were. A lot of it depended on the personal relationship between the various Thai army. It was the Thai army people that were the staff of this station because the military was running the counterinsurgency program up there. A lot if it depended on just the personal chemistry between you and the person you were working with. I was very lucky in that I got along very well with the number two at the station, one of the reporters. And whenever one of the reporters and I went out into the field to interview people or gather information, I think things worked pretty well. My supervisor tended to be much more kind of efficient and kind of I guess you would say goal oriented and wanted to play by the rules. I think he found it much more difficult. He was older too, I mean he was, that was 1968 so I was 28 years old at that point; he was probably around 48. I think he had it tougher. He also didn't have the language. We all

were speaking provincial Thai from our Peace Corps days just a year or two before, so it was easier for us to get along with local villagers.

Q: Well did you have a problem adjusting to being part of the establishment from having been aloof from the establishment when you were in the Peace Corps?

BERRINGTON: You see I didn't consider myself part of the establishment. We weren't at the embassy. I was kidding myself. I started going through this little game of I am not really part of those guys in Bangkok. In fact my supervisor was who as I say was maybe 48, he was the same way. He kind of looked down and disparaged what was going on at the embassy in Bangkok too, as is typical of any branch or regional operation as opposed to headquarters. So it was very much a kind of game that I was playing. But of course, as time goes by and you accustom yourself to bureaucratic procedures and all that, you start to buy into it as well, no question about it.

Q: What was the threat in northeastern Thailand? Was the feeling of our people, of which you were part now, that there was a significant threat?

BERRINGTON: Oh yes, very much so. In fact I think that is probably that is one of the less touted achievements of the U.S. government or of the SEATO allies I guess you might say because the Brits and others were doing other things in Thailand. It wasn't just one country. But we were able to keep this from getting worse than it became. And of course a lot of credit had to be given to the Thai government, the Thai government itself. Sure there were good guys and bad guys in government, but many of them were very patriotic and very motivated and you know, felt very strongly about the issues.

There were some bad things going on. I mean we used to travel, the reporter and I. Not every day but there were many times when we would go out on our information gathering excursions when we were under armed guard. I mean there were people out there ready to do violence. I can remember one village head man that I liked and admired very much who three or four months later was assassinated. It was sort of like what had been going on in Vietnam before Vietnam became really as bad as it was. Of course, we never put in any troops; we never did anything like that, but there was clearly a threat. And the Thai government had been very indifferent and even downright hostile in some cases to its regional areas particularly a place like the northeast which as I said earlier was economically backward and largely full of Vietnamese and Lao minority groups. So that was very much a neglected area for years.

Q: Well, did you feel that we were trying to do things in the northeast provinces maybe the Thai government might have just let go or something?

BERRINGTON: Well, that's a hard one to second guess at this time. I mean there were many times in my time there when I thought Oh my God nothing any good is ever going to come out of this. There were times when I thought the Thais are going to screw it up again. Then there were times when I was really quite moved by the motivation and

dedication of some of my colleagues. Given the kind of violence and trouble that was always there in the background, the Americans were lucky. If it ever really became a crisis we knew a helicopter was going to come in and pull us out in time like what happened in Saigon. You know it was easy for us to stand off and kind of look at this with some remote objectivity. With the Thais it was their homeland, their country. I always had a hard time at the time I was being very subjective in my judgments of this and that, but now given the years and a bit more maturity I think I would be less eager to judge say whether they were doing everything right or wrong. But in the long run I guess some of us and others must have been doing something right because the insurgency was turned back.

Q: Was there a problem of trying to get the Thais to even handedly treat the Vietnamese minority?

BERRINGTON: Oh, of course, yes. That was one of the most difficult things because in any of these Asian societies, Japan included, diversity is not a strong point. I mean it is not quite as tribal as places in Africa or Catholics versus Protestants in Ireland but it is there. It is something difficult for many people. I can remember when we arrived in the Peace Corps and the headmaster, the bad on that I finally got kicked out. He expressed great relief that I was a real American and not a black American. So, they were even sensitive to the idea that they would be getting a non white American something second or third class in there.

Q: Later Bangkok developed quite a reputation as an R&R (Rest and Recreation) stop for the GI's (WWII slang for soldier), I was wondering whether some USIA officers had problems with this?

BERRINGTON: Well some of them did. I have to say I was one of the ones that did. But that I think was probably part of my overall makeup which again is part of my Peace Corps mentality I kept referring to. I tended to eschew, to distance myself from the American community, and the idea of going to Bangkok and yukking it up with the Americans and going out to where the GI's and the bars were didn't appeal to me. It wasn't just Bangkok. I mean any of the places where there were airbases, as you know in that time there were a lot of airbases in Thailand. There was one in Udorn which was just 60-70 miles up the road. There was one in Ubon which was about 150 miles to the south in the other part of the northeast. Both of them were little Sodom and Gomorrah sites as well. Yes, I found that a very deplorable and kind of embarrassing part of the American presence. I still do; that is something I still feel strongly about.

Q: Were you by this time able to have good relations not just official but friendly relations with many of your Thai counterparts?

BERRINGTON: Thai counterparts, oh, sure, yes. We got along pretty well. Again it was based on personal chemistry. I got along with some persons better than the others. Oh no, it was sort of like we were all out there on the front lines together, and we all had to help

each other. I can remember one night we were staying in a small village which we traveled to over tracks that were bare imitations of roads and then sometimes muddy ruts in the rainy season. All the cars we drove were 4-wheel drives and had winches on the front bumper so we could wrap a line around a tree and pull ourselves out of the mud. Anyway, we were in a very small village, and we were staying in a temple. That was the only place you could be put up. About halfway through the night about three or four A.M. we were awakened and the village headman said, "You have to leave now." We said, "Why?" He said, because the CT's are coming." CTs are communist terrorists. So, we quickly packed our bags such as they were and were out of there in about five minutes. We couldn't even turn on the headlights. We had to drive in the dark by moonlight through these horrible jungle roads and trails. When you do that sort of thing together with other people, the bonding becomes pretty strong. Yes, with some there it was a pretty close relationship.

Q: Well now, did the Tet offensive in Vietnam [January 31, 1968], which took place at about the time you arrived in Thailand, raise concerns on the part of the Thais about America's will?

BERRINGTON: No. Not that I remember. We were still such a strong presence there. Now who knows. Consider we were at the working level. These were questions that might be better posed to people in Bangkok dealing with...

Q: I was wondering if this translated down there at all.

BERRINGTON: No. We were there; there was a lot of American money there, and I don't recall there ever being any questions from them. And we talked about a lot of things, because these were basically young Thai army sergeants, lieutenants. The guy, the deputy of the station who I was friendliest with was a major, so these weren't senior Thais.

Q: Did you get a feel for the Thai military?

BERRINGTON: Yes.

Q: What was your impression?

BERRINGTON: Disorganized, corrupt, with a leadership element that varied from outstanding to appalling. Probably like many other military groups in small countries. But there were a lot of good guys. I think the ones we had at our station tended to be more motivated people because they tended to send to our station people from the northeast who could speak the local dialect. That was very important. If you were interviewing a farmer in Lao or Vietnamese, you have got to be able to speak it. These were people who saw pretty much what was going on there was going on in their backyards, so they were more motivated and more willing to get out there and really work for what they saw.

Q: Was there much social intercourse between the Thais that you knew and the Vietnamese and Lao residents of the area?

BERRINGTON: Not much, although there was a Vietnamese restaurant in town that was considered to be one of the best restaurants. I am talking about a tiny town with about four restaurants. But the Vietnamese restaurant was considered to be the best restaurant. And yet even though we knew it was Vietnamese and the woman was Vietnamese, all the cooks were Vietnamese, we always used to sort of half joke that even though we could talk shop and business in the restaurant, we wonder what they are picking up and passing on even though I think, the idea that these people were passing on information to the enemy was probably fantasy. It was probably a woman and her staff that couldn't care less about it. They were just eking out their daily living.

Q: Did you have much contact with the powers that be at the embassy in USIS?

BERRINGTON: Yes. I mean there would always be the PAO (Public Affairs Officer) coming up and visiting. I don't think, let's see, I am trying to remember who was ambassador. I think it was Graham Martin part of the time, who was of course, one of the most vainglorious ambassadors in the history of the foreign service. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Martin served in Bangkok from November 1963 to September 1967.]

Q: You have got his number.

BERRINGTON: Then Leonard Unger arrived [Editor's Note: Ambassador Unger presented his credentials on October 4, 1967 and departed post on November 19, 1973]. He would later be ambassador to Taiwan as well. One of the best guys. He and his wife traveled around. A fabulous terrific guy. I admired both of them very much. I admired both of them proportionally as much as I did not admire Martin. Yes, we got the traveling salesmen that came through, the visiting firemen. They didn't come through a lot because you have got to remember this was one of the more provincial, dangerous, and difficult parts of the country. Most of these guys, frankly, would just as soon not go there.

Q: What were you thinking about this experience as a career?

BERRINGTON: Oh I thought it was terrific. You know I was doing what that guy when I was in the Peace Corps the one that came through every couple of months to show movies, I was doing what he was doing. It was fun. I was going out and drinking booze with the village headman. I was running around with armed guards, all very dramatic or I would say melodramatic and enjoyable. I thought it was terrific even though I knew it was a two year contract, I thought it was wonderful.

Q: Well did you have a feeling that, two year contract or not, basically this was the entree to a good career move?

BERRINGTON: Yes. I probably was hoping something would come of this, but I still wasn't quite sure. I had home leave after…it must have been after a year, and decided I have enjoyed this job a lot, so I took the written foreign service exam. I decided you know, in case I wanted to continue with the foreign service, I will have taken the test. I passed the test, the written test. So I had that in my file, even though this was a limited career appointment.

After a year of or a year plus at this radio station, Bangkok offered me a job as a BPAO in a place called Yala which is in southern Thailand. It was in effect the same game that I was doing in the northeast, except that there wasn't a radio station there. I became a full fledged BPAO rather than this kind of radio officer type that I had in the northeast. I was still running around helping the Thai government with its counterinsurgency program. In the south the big difference was the insurgents were Muslim, not Vietnamese or Lao. That was the minority group down there, because the four southern provinces were seized from the Malay at the height of Thai power in the 19th century. But as far as the methodology, the issues, it was all the same thing, sort of a different cast of characters. In some ways it was more interesting because the Islamic or Muslim insurgents were not only a different religion, many of them were ethnic Chinese. Frankly most of us in the U.S. government, as well as the Thai government, regarded them as probably more efficient and more formidable opponents because it is safe to say the Chinese can be better at this sort of thing.

Q: Well, was this a reflection of the earlier insurgency in Malaysia in the 1950s; that was a formidable group?

BERRINGTON: Oh, yes. They were the original MCPs. That is not male chauvinist pig but Malayan Communist Party. The guys that ran that thanks to the British efforts back in the '50s, many of them had been driven away from the main parts of Malaysia into the very mountainous jungle area along the spine of the peninsula. I mean we are talking about serious mountain jungle area along the Malay-Thai border. The prefecture that I was in, Yala, was right up against that area, so the CT's, the communist terrorists, from that part were direct descendants from the old MCP crowd from Malaya. The Emergency they called it.

Q: The Emergency was a serious insurgency that took considerable time and British forces to bring it under control. But I would think in Thailand, since you didn't have the British army, you had a different approach.

BERRINGTON: Quite definitely. You still had the same old strengths and weaknesses of the Thai effort that I alluded to earlier, the corruption and the inefficiencies and whatever. The big difference though was there weren't as many Thai from that part of the country that they could send there to be key parts of the operation as they could in the northeast. First of all it is more distant and secondly they were a totally different religion. I mean the Vietnamese and the Lao tended to share at least Buddhism and more ethnic commonalties. The Malays, the Chinese Islamic Malays were almost a totally different

ethnic religious group. In many respects they were a harder bunch to deal with, and in fact if memory serves correct, there are still remnants of them in the jungle down there even today.

Q: Were you doing really the same thing or was this a different game?

BERRINGTON: Yes we were. The big difference I used to say was in the northeast we used to run around in jeeps going through muddy and horrible roads. In the south we tended to do it in boats going on rivers which made it probably even more melodramatic. They were interesting trips. Yes, we would go out on these, it would be this huge excursion where the governor and deputy governor of the province plus many of his people from public health and agronomy and education, they were called mobile information teams, MIT's. These mobile information teams would go out, and there would always be a USIS person with them. We would handle the public affairs part of this. The Thais would handle the other more technical aspects of trying to set up a public health station or trying to provide better agricultural methods to the farmers or the fishermen in the south or whatever the local economy was doing. Sometimes there would be a local AID from the U.S. along as well or maybe a CIA or something too, but by and large the American presence was USIS.

Q: Were these armed expeditions?

BERRINGTON: Oh, always. Particularly if the governor or deputy governor was along, then there would be armed guards always. Now I was in Yala for only a short time, not even a half year I don't think. One day the USIA, the area director, Dan Oleksiw who was one of the grand characters in USIS in those days. Dan came along and said, "You know we are thinking of cutting down on our Thai program." I'm sure this was budget because the Vietnam was still going strong. For whatever reason, they were deciding to cut back on the Thai program. "We are thinking of cutting back on the Thai program and we are thinking of beefing up our Japan program. I see you have Japanese in your background." I said, "Yes." He said, "How would you like to go to Japan?" I though that sounds pretty good! I figured I would kind of push my luck with all the things going on in Thailand, why not go someplace a little bit safer and more solid, and Japan was after all my real love. As much as I loved Southeast Asia, Japan was my first. I said, "Okay." I went back to Washington in the summer of '69. I told them by the way I have already passed the written foreign service test. Is there any way I can get this limited career converted to something else? They said, "Why don't you take the oral interview?" I took the oral interview and I passed it, so that was when I became a full fledged Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Do you recall any questions they asked you on the oral interview?

BERRINGTON: They asked me something about music. I remember they asked me something about Aaron Copeland. They asked me a lot about Japan and Japanese politics and all the language. I was able to handle these. I was still following that. They asked a

lot about Thailand. It was not the typical kind of oral which you and I might have remembered. I suppose because I was already on the payroll. Frankly I was much more surprised when I got through the written test than the oral interview. So at that point I said good-by to Thailand in the summer of 1969.

I am just trying to think if there was anything else about Thailand that really was important. Were there any other questions about Thailand?

Q: Well I was just wondering did you find there were a core of people in USIA, or other organizations, that sort of fell in love with Thailand? I mean you have China hands and you have Arab hands etc. I have never heard much about Thailand.

BERRINGTON: Well that is interesting, because that was at a time when we had I think 13 branch posts, USIS, 13 in Thailand. I also think…I was very young and new, and this is more information I believe in later on than there at the time, but with that many posts and given what was going on in Vietnam and the importance they kept telling us they were attaching to the whole counterinsurgency business, that was often called by many people the golden era of embassy activities in Thailand. Many of the people who were there I have to say, I can't speak about State as much as USIS, but many people who were in USIS Thailand at that time went on to have very good careers. I think many of us still look back on Thailand as a wonderful; time.

I talked about the bonding between us and our Thai counterparts. There was a lot of that I think between the Americans as well, particularly among those of us who were up country. When you have 13 branch posts and let me think about State. You have consulates in Udorn, Ubon, Korat, Chiang Mai, well there is five right there. That was a lot of consulates for only a country of 30 million people. I think all of us felt that we were really part of a big important unified team. I mean there were some guys who were clearly kind of on the outs or didn't fit in quite as well, but particularly within USIS, I think we felt there was good morale. I think that is a good way of putting it.

Q: Back in the States this was the beginning of the great protests against Vietnam that hit so much of the intellectual community, the very source of Foreign Service recruits, was that having any effect on you all or was that far away at the time you were in Thailand?

BERRINGTON: Yes to a degree. I have to say while I was in Thailand, I was being pushed and pulled. On the one hand, I was still pretty much a true believer in the Vietnam War. I had not yet gone that far. I would later on, but I was still pretty much a true believer in the Vietnam War, because I saw what was happening in Thailand and I just kind of projected that into Vietnam, and if it was as bad as it was in Thailand, my God what must it be like in Vietnam. But on the other hand, I saw the bad things the Americans were doing in Thailand. I mean the whole business as you described it of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the sort of American domination of things. There were some of the people in USIS Thailand who I did not admire so much who thought only about the

bureaucratic this and that and really seemed to think more about advancing their careers than anything to do with Thailand. Remember I was still in my Peace Corps mentality.

Again project that to a much larger bureaucracy in Vietnam with a much heavier American military involvement, and of course, I was very skeptical of the military, the American military. On the one hand I thought the war was what we should be doing, and on the other hand, I was becoming more and more disillusioned. You know, it wasn't any kind of dramatic overnight epiphany (hand clap); it was something that was slowly eating away at my commitment, and commitment to the war. My colleagues and I talked about it. There was a lot of exchange of ideas, and I can't speak for all of my colleagues, but I suspect there were one or two who felt like me that on the one hand it was good but weren't we getting a bit over our heads. I must say by the time I left Thailand, I was thinking more and more why were we the Americans doing what we were doing when isn't this what the Thais should be doing? Isn't there a little bit too much big brother telling little brother how to run the show? This was really starting to nag at me. I suspect when Dan Oleksiw showed up on his visit one day and said how about going to Japan, in the back of my mind there was a feeling I better get out while the getting out is good. Somebody's is going to wake up one day and say wait a minute, we shouldn't be doing as much as we were, and we should be transferring a lot of this to the Thais. If you recall, that was also a period in Vietnam where they were trying to do more Vietnamization. I'm sure that must have been passed on as well. So, yes, you saw the beginnings of a greater critical mass there as far as the war was concerned, and I think many of us given the opportunity to go elsewhere probably took advantage of it. Although the two years were terrific.

Q: Today is the first of May, May Day, 2000. Robin, you were assigned to Japan, 1969-1973, where did you go and what were your initial duties?

BERRINGTON: Well I arrived in Tokyo in January in the winter of 1969. They wanted me to become what they called the student affairs officer. It was an ACAO position (Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer.

I was first assigned as the student officer for the embassy. That was fine with me, but shortly after I arrived one of those curious combination of events which probably are not that infrequent in the foreign service, one person's wife said something that upset somebody. Everybody got very emotional about it. The officer decided that he didn't want to stay in Japan. He left; his position came open, and in a domino effect, other people were transferred to fill his position and the other position before him, and as a result, the branch PAO slot which was the branch Public Affairs Officer slot in Fukuoka which is the southernmost and westernmost major city of Japan came open. That appealed to me much more mainly because it took me outside the capital city. It put me in charge of my own operation, and as a student of Japanese history and Japanese affairs, Kyushu which is the island where Fukuoka is located has always been sort of the cradle of Japanese heritage and politics. It is far and away the center that has produced the most political

leaders and cultural leaders of the country. Kind of not unlike the south is to the United States. So when the chance came to go there, I grabbed it, and was assigned.

However there was going to be an interim period before that actually came open, so they put me in language school from January to September even though I already had the language and had scored a 3/3 or 3+/3+, I can't remember [Editor's Note: In FSI language competency testing the first score is reading, the second is speaking. The score of three suggests competency at the college level]. So I bided my time in language school in Yokohama before I went to Fukuoka. Which was not a bad development because being in the language school for a few months; it enabled me to meet some of my colleagues who would eventually be assigned to the embassy in Tokyo. If I had gone straight to Fukuoka these would have been just names, but now they were faces and voices and real living bodies. It was helpful to have had that kind of bonding experience even if it was for a very short period.

Q: Who was our ambassador in Japan at that time?

BERRINGTON: At that point the Ambassador was U. Alexis Johnson who arrived in 1966 and departed post in January 1969, shortly after I arrived. He was one of the grand old men of the Japan-hands crowd.

Q: Well then what was the state of affairs in Kyushu-Fukuoka when you got there?

BERRINGTON: Well, in fact in a way I was walking into something of a hornet's nest although I didn't know it at the time. Kyushu, being the way it is geographically, it is the closest part to Korea. It is also the closest island to the China mainland, so it has always been an important military and strategic base. not just for the Japanese but for the American occupation forces and for those American military based in Japan once the occupation was over. So, we had several bases still in Kyushu when I got there.

There was a U.S. Air Force base called Itazuke. Itazuke had a large air force contingent there. Just a few months before I arrived a jet plane, it was either taking off or landing, I can't quite remember, lost power and crashed into Kyushu University [Editor's Note: this reference may be to the crash of an RF-4C the night on June 2, 1968] setting off all the radicals on campus into a frenzy of anti Americanism, and you know just provided the further excuse that they wanted to demonstrate and just cause general chaos. That was the kind of stage at which young Mr. Berrington walked onto the scene. So you had a very kind of delicate tense relationship with the base which was located very close to the city, and with the city leaders, the political leaders as well as the economic business leaders. [Editor's Note: In 1971 it was announced that Itazuke would be returned to Japanese control, and the USAF facilities were closed on 31 March 1972.]

At the same time we had a naval base in Sasebo. That was a constant source of tension as well because nuclear-powered or aircraft carriers often came in to Sasebo. Of course, the American policy being that they would never confirm or deny the existence of nuclear

weapons. But anything that came into the port was usually the focus and object of various demonstrators and political malcontents that just wanted to stir up trouble with the Americans. So between this crash of a fighter plane into the computer building at the University in Fukuoka and the constant in and out of American warships in Sasebo, in terms of political relationships there was a lot of tension and a lot of activity to keep you on your toes.

Q: Who was consul in Fukuoka at that time?

BERRINGTON: In those days, before job inflation, a lot of the posts in Japan were just consulates. A new consul arrived about the same time I did. His name was Jerry Sutton. The American Center was located in a nice old building right downtown in the very center of the city. In fact it was a building which had been the old bankers club before the war, and during the war it became a military officers club. After the war when the occupation took it up it became a kind of headquarters for all occupation activities in the Kyushu area. After the occupation ended, the embassy of course, took it over and it then became the American…well at that time it was called the American Cultural Center, but within a few years of that time it became the American Center.

There is one little anecdote which I always found amusing, in light of the extremist students and the crashed plane in the university. The American Center was located, as I mentioned, right downtown in the very core area. On our right side was the top newspaper of Kyushu called Nishi-Nippon Shimbun. On our left side was the LDP headquarters building. Across the street was city hall. Down the street just a half a block was the prefectural government headquarters building. We couldn't have had more establishment neighbors. We used to call our neighbor, because of all the student demonstrators and often labor unions demonstrations as well; it was sort of like the "A" court. Because you would catch all of these people together. It was not unusual for me to…our building was a three story building and there was a balcony off on the third floor…stand out there and look down this broad avenue, which had all of these establishment offices on either side. You could look down and you could see literally the whole street just full of people, often waving placards, shouting slogans, raising their fists, all very organized, scripted of course. Then they did the famous snake dancing which you will recall from the Eisenhower period; the Zengakuren.

Q: That died about...

BERRINGTON: Oh no. Zengakuren [All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Government Associations (□□□□□□□□□□□□, Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō] was still very much...

Q: I was thinking of guys with ties around, bandannas around their head.

BERRINGTON: Bandannas. I had a, I ripped out a page from the newspapers which had a listing of the helmets and the headbands that the kids wore because factionalism in

Japan was rampant. Zengakuren had lots of factions in it. If it was a green helmet with a red band around the mouth, then I knew that's faction A, and if it was a black helmet with a white band it would be somebody else. We could always tell who was who. In Japan the uniform is extremely important. You wear a uniform whether you are a businessman, whether you are a student, whether you are a tennis player or whatever. So I would often be up in the top of the building there just watching the snake dancing demonstrations. I can remember one time I was down on the main floor by the entrance of the building, and the groups were chanting and snake dancing past us when at one point one of the kids darted out, ran up the driveway to us. I thought Uh-oh, what's this. He said, Koncho-San, that was my title in Japanese for director. He said, "Koncho-San, here is a book I borrowed from the library. Please take it." And ran back into that demonstration and disappeared into that sea of people. In a way that was a kind of a metaphor for the whole business of the Japanese and the United States. You know, they could demonstrate against us. They could yell things at us. They could carry on like that, but they were always interested in what we were. They were always willing to borrow books. They were always eager to find out more about the United States. In the long run, and there were other examples too where a kid would run out of the line or they would come up to us and say kind of quietly, "Can I use the bathroom?" They felt very comfortable with us. They liked the Americans, and that sort of made the stay of people like Jerry Sutton and myself very pleasant in a place like Kyushu.

The consulate, on the other hand, was located in a new building about two to three miles west of it, west of the downtown where we were in a large park called Ohori Park, a wonderful beautiful building. Jerry and his staff were in the consulate, and I and my staff were in the American Center. We were geographically separated although we would see each other three to four times a week, whether at meetings at the consulate or at the Center or socially and professionally around town.

Q: During this '69-'73 period, what essentially were your tasks?

BERRINGTON: The task of USIS Japan was really not that different from anyplace, of a USIS post anywhere, which is basically to improve…to deepen broaden and generally improve the understanding between the United States and the host country. In order to do that, of course, we employed an array of program tools among which were speakers, who we would bring in to Fukuoka to give talks at the Center itself or at outside institutions around town. We had a large library located in the Center which was pen to the public. Anybody could come in, go out and borrow books or look at magazines or check out the reference materials and other documentary materials that we had. We would work at press placement to get important statements or articles in the local press which was both electronic and print media. We would set up exhibits or arrange for cultural presentations, usually quite modest because we didn't have a large budget for that. We had the exchanges program in which we could nominate local leaders for the IV program which is better known as the international visitor program. Representation, of course, at which both Jerry and I would run around and attend various activities. Goodness I am sure I am

forgetting something else. But those are sort of the real basic weapons or tools that we had to work at deepening this dialogue between Japanese Americans on current issues.

Q: Well let's focus on a couple of things. In the first place, could you talk about, maybe they are quite different, but your dealings with both the Navy and the Air Force and the impact they are having on the community and what they were proposing?

BERRINGTON: OK let's take the American military. They had what they called public information officers of their own, who held the rank of lieutenant or kind of junior captain in the air force, or just lieutenant in the navy. Usually these people had no Japanese experience or Japanese language, but they were seen as people who would be fairly good on their feet and capable of dealing with the community and good at PR (public relations). But like most military, their lives tended to be very much focused on the base. They didn't get out that much. They didn't know that many people in the community, and they tended to have a fairly narrow focus on all these issues.

We in the embassy tended to look at a broader perspective at whatever was happening. Some of that - let's say - if a submarine was coming into town, it would be my job to go down there, work with the local PIO, Public Information Officer, and try to arrange for press activity or maybe appearances on local television show in advance or try to get some materials out and about and introduce him to people that he might not have otherwise known. Because, well first of all as I say, they didn't have the language, and secondly he was so busy on base with the things that he had to do there that he just didn't have the time to get out and meet people. Particularly in a country like Japan you just don't walk in to an editor's office and say bang on the table, "here is a press release. I want you to put this in." There is a lot of stroking and cultivating of friendships and relationships that are required. I think those of us that were civilians that were not wearing a uniform probably found it easier to do that than the military, partly because of our language ability, partly because we tended to be around longer, and let's face it, for many Japanese, anything in uniform was still suspect. Remember this is only, gosh the occupation was over in '52, so we are talking about only 15 plus years since the end of the occupation. You know, memories of the war and the American occupation were still very fresh.

Q: How did you find the level of cooperation from the military, because sometimes you know, there is almost a built in suspicion, who are these people and what are they doing?

BERRINGTON: The PIOs were wonderful. I had nothing but the greatest respect for them given their limitations linguistically and experience and time. Particularly the one at the airbase in Fukuoka was great because he had a Japanese wife, and he knew…well let's put it this way, he knew what he didn't know, so he wasn't quite as full of himself. So the PIOs tended to be pretty decent guys who were cooperative and were happy to get our help. The problem, of course, was very often with their superior officers, some of whom had less than what I would call enlightened views about community relations or the position of the Japanese in world affairs or how to deal with the Japanese in terms of

achieving other interests besides just the local base concerns. They didn't often see how base issues fit into a larger fabric of U.S. Japan relationship. They tended to see only in terms of what's happening at this base yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and that was about it. There were particularly in the air force. I have to say the navy was generally easier to deal with, even the senior officers. I had quite good personal relations with base commanders. This was I think, quite amazing for me because let's face it, I was a young 29 year old still wet behind the ears, junior officer of the embassy, and the base commander of Sasebo was a Captain, a very experienced Captain who probably would be promoted to flag rank within a few years. So the navy was generally easier to deal with. The air force had I'm afraid a number of what I would call the Curtis LeMay types that saw the Japanese in very racist and prejudicial terms and frankly would have been happy just to go in with guns or bombs and sort of get rid of the opposition whatever their attitudes might have been. It was a bigger challenge with the air force than with the navy.

Q: Well when you were there, did you work on any programs or initiatives to get our military to better know the Japanese and get the Japanese to better know the military?

BERRINGTON: I have to say, now here I am going to reveal my own limitations. At the beginning I thought that would be a great idea. In fact, whenever I hosted an event, let's say there was a cocktail party at the American Center, or I was having a reception at my home, or Jerry Sutton the consul did much the same thing. We would try to include select senior officers or important representatives of the base community in order to give them an opportunity to meet the local Japanese because the largest number of our invitees to events like that were the local Japanese community. I mean first of all we are not over there to invite Americans to these things, and second of all in a town like Fukuoka there weren't many Americans anyway, outside the base of course. Yes, we tried to include as many of the base people as would have been appropriate. I mean we didn't want an overwhelming number. Say it was a part for maybe 40-50 people; I would usually include three or four uniformed people from one of the bases.

As time went by, I think I began to realize that in many cases this was a lost cause. Many of those who were the most hard-nosed and kind of difficult to deal with probably weren't going to change on the basis of my efforts to get them to change. For many of the GI's, you know, the enlisted, many of them were just as happy to stay on the base, and go to the bowling alley and go to the movie and eat their hamburgers and frequent the bars that tended to spring up around the perimeter of the base. I wasn't sure that was an entirely bad thing because for a lot of these folks to try and put them downtown in a large group of Japanese invited a little friction or problems. There were enough problems already without kind of bringing more by pushing this too hard. I think more importantly rather than the social or political or the understanding side, just by getting a more open attitude among the base officers to meeting with the local press or agreeing to go on local television or getting that press release out there - in Japanese if possible, for example, we tended to mark our achievement in things just like that rather than in getting total understanding between the base people and the local Japanese.

Q: Well at this time what was sort of the political orientation of Kyushu Province and Fukuoka?

BERRINGTON: Interesting area. As I said it was sort of the cradle of Japanese heritage. It has always been one of the more conservative centers of Japan. Again the comparison with the American south is not that bad. Strongly aware of Japanese heritage, very nationalistic, but at the same time, and this is common to many Japanese cities, there was also this broad streak of internationalism which Kyushu tended to have because it was kind of the doorway to Korea, and East Asia, and China from Japan. You have to remember that when Japan was a closed country for hundreds of years, the one opening, the one back door in which the Japanese could peek out at the west and the west could peek in was Nagasaki which was, of course, one of the major cities of Kyushu. So while it was extremely conservative, there was this sort of slightly contradictory element of internationalism in the Kyushu makeup. At that time, Japan was pretty much a two party system. The controlling party was called the Liberal Democratic Party, the LDP, and the opposition was called the Japan Socialist Party, the JSP. The JSP was a permanent opposition. They had never held power until a very brief period a few years after the occupation, and since then they have never done it again. The LDP, although it seemed like an eternal ruling party because in effect their party president became prime minister no matter who it was, so it was just continuous periods of LDP prime ministers who had run Japan, except for that very brief period under the JSP. Many of the LDP leaders came from Kyushu, so the fact that there was that kind of geographical base for many of these people meant that Kyushu got a lot of attention from Tokyo. It also meant that because at that time and still today, the Japanese looked to the U.S. as their most important, their senior, their number one ally in everything, places like an American consulate or an American Center tended to be seen as an extension of the embassy. For those of us who were assigned there, it was a very nice place to be. We tended to get cooperation in almost everything, from the officials. We tended to be included in almost everything. There was a certain prestige and status associated with anything the embassy, and perhaps even more so out there in the provinces. It was in many ways a very comfortable arrangement. We were, Jerry Sutton and I as the two senior Americans in town, the two senior non military Americans in town, we tended to be the beneficiaries of all of this.

Q: How did you find your relations were with the press and the media in general?

BERRINGTON: Electronic media was a different thing. The electronic media tended to be very friendly. If I said I wanted to go on TV to talk about something or make a statement or whatever, usually it could be done. The print media were something else, and that is largely because of…well in Japan, the print media were seen as a more viable opposition to the government than the Japan Socialist Party was. They kind of looked upon themselves as being the one voice that could say things and chide the government or raise objections or criticize in a kind of grand tradition of providing that kind of voice. So on one hand personally they were always extremely friendly, but on the other hand, they were required a lot more massaging and a lot more persuading to get them to say take materials that we might offer them explaining the American side. There was almost a

more instinctive or knee jerk, I won't say anti Americanism. The military would have called it that. But I would say an instinctive or knee jerk tendency to criticize America, even over the slightest things. If let's say an American ship sailed in to Sasebo, whether it had nuclear weapons or nuclear power or not, the press always tended to see a boogie man under the bed and tended to exacerbate the problem by insinuating that there might be nuclear weapons or some problem and that one of our main responsibilities was to kind of keep the press from going out too far on some of these sometimes sensationalistic stands to stir things up.

Q: How would you try to keep them from going too far? Was the press sort of sensationalist in the form that so much of the British press is, sex and scandal and that sort of thing?

BERRINGTON: No, it was more sensationalist in just accepting hearsay and gossip. The mainline Japanese press are very much like the British press in that there is no naked girls or sex to speak of, a little bit but not that much. That type of material tended to be in the magazine sector of the Japanese print media or in there were a number of tabloid papers as well some of which tended to come out in the evening, good for the commuters when they were riding home on the train. But as far as the mainstream press of which there were two papers in Fukuoka, no you wouldn't have called them any kind of a sleaze and sex, not at all. But they did often pick up a story and just run with it even though they may not have checked it out completely. The idea of verifying two or three sources before running a story is not exactly a popular custom in Japan. You know, if the headline said "nuclear weapons on aircraft carrier in Sasebo harbor," and if in fact that wasn't true at all, they didn't care that much. The rumor was the story of the day and they would run it; they could always run a denial the next day with further investigation we feel that was not true, but for them moment it was just as easy to run it.

Q: You had aircraft carriers in there. I am not a navy man but I have to assume that any aircraft carrier would probably be very likely to have nuclear arms on board. How would you if you can't confirm or deny, you have to be very careful if a cargo ship comes in you can't say it is a cargo ship, it can't have it. Then you are pretty much pointing your finger at a warship that probably does have those.

BERRINGTON: You just of course put your finger on one of the basic dilemmas that all of us face. We had to fall back upon at that time the Japanese had what they called the three pillars of a non nuclear policy, one of which was never to allow nuclear weapons in their country. They said the American government respected that. What we would say is we follow the three basic pillars of the non nuclear policy and we do not deny or confirm the presence or absence of nuclear weapons and we can't say any more. So it's I am putting our statements in very simple terms.

Q: It sounds like you couldn't go after somebody and refute a claim that we have nuclear weapons on board outside of making a formal statement to the press.

BERRINGTON: Well, in effect, we would have to say the ship is there because of strategic interests in Asia. Japan and the U.S. are co-signees to a security treaty. Ship visits are a part of the Japanese obligation being a co-signee, and again we will not confirm or deny. You had to couch it in other terms, which it was there for reasons that were more important than whether or not there were nuclear weapons on it. Of course what we have since found out is that there were of course, as many had suspected all along. The Japanese government said they didn't even want to know whether or not there were nuclear weapons on any of these, of course did know. We just in fact denied things; they were party to a broad policy to I guess you would call it deceit.

Q: But at the same time it was, I mean anybody who followed military affairs even as an amateur could almost point a finger to which ship would have and which wouldn't have.

BERRINGTON: Of course. It was one of those fictions that we all you know, paid attention to. All of us played this game; everybody knew what was happening, and the media in a way was just as much a party to it as anybody else. They didn't really go out and investigate that much. They never turned up any evidence of there being anything. It was sort of like a, I hate to use the word, but kind of like a Kabuki drama. They knew what the roles and the parts were but nobody ever did anything other than that.

Q: Now your tour was during the height of Vietnam. How was that playing down in your area? What were you doing?

BERRINGTON: Well that of course, was one of the reasons for all of this activity in these bases because particularly Okinawa which was further on down from Kyushu. A large marine contingency was in Okinawa. Most of the visits had some kind of connection to a larger East Asian strategy. The Japanese were very unhappy with what was going on in Vietnam. They saw the war largely in racist terms, you know the white Americans beating up on the yellow Vietnamese. Probably without too much effort they could be reminded of what they had gone through in World War II. The Japanese suffer from something called the victimization attitude. They like to see themselves as a kind of victim status a victim situation. WWII was for them a great national tragedy largely because they saw themselves as victimized by the West, not just the Americans but the British, the Dutch and others. The two atom bombs, Nagasaki and Hiroshima, were very much seen as the most egregious final result of their victimization. Now of course, lost in all of this woe-is-me attitude is how the war started and Pearl Harbor and all of that. But never mind, we all have our forgetful moments. So it was easy for them to kind of by extension of this innate victimization they had of their own to look towards the Vietnamese as being exploited or victimized by the west as well, so there was a sort of big brother/little brother attitude there about gosh that is awful. In a way they wished we could end it, get it over with and get out so they wouldn't have to have this problem weighing on their conscious as much as it was. But of course it wasn't that easy. Needless to say at the same time, and this is something the Japanese didn't exactly play up very much, was the large commercial profit taking by the Japanese corporations with what was

going on not only within Japan but southeast Asia as well. So that probably for those that really wanted to dig deeply would cause some feelings of guilt.

Q: All I know is that during part of this period I was consul general in Saigon and the most dangerous part of the war for me was these damn little Honda scooters which I think are still in the streets of Saigon today. This is obviously not without profit to the Japanese.

BERRINGTON: Oh not at all. It wasn't just that. It was all the materials passing through Japan on the way to Southeast Asia. And of course, there was a huge Japanese presence in Thailand of corporate representatives and business activities. Of course, we had all the military bases in Thailand as well, so the Japanese were doing quite well thank you.

Q: Was there a Japanese business community that carried clout that you were dealing with in Fukuoka?

BERRINGTON: Yes. Well the Japanese businessman is a very important part of the establishment in Japan. They have very influential business organizations. In Fukuoka it was called the Kyukeiren which was the Kyushu version of the nationwide Keidanren which is well known as one of the leading Japanese business lobbying organizations. I would regularly get together with businessmen to talk about the issues, to encourage them to maybe fund activities we were interested in. The business community, of course, was more the province of the consul than it was of the American Center, but Fukuoka being a smaller town, it was about a million population, and the establishment of Fukuoka being a kind of rather small well definable group, and because Jerry and I were the only two people there, I mean it was kind of easy for us to move back and forth. He would get involved with a media group with my great support as much as I would get involved with the business community and he didn't mind that. So yes, I would frequently see business leaders. Although my natural constituency tended to be more the media and the educational communities.

Q: What about the educational community because one always thinks about the brighter Japanese university student is on the barricades while a student, and is immediately thereafter moves into corporate or government headquarters where he is sitting on the other side. Was this pattern there too?

BERRINGTON: Oh you summed it up very well, and particularly at Kyushu University which if you will recall, that burned out hulk of that plane is still sitting there on that campus. Because of the political sensitivities, Vietnam, all of the bases at that time, the extremist students would not consent to allowing the authorities to come in and take the plane out. In a way this perpetuated this symbol of American imperialism and American military oppression or name your cliché of the time. So it was very difficult for me to go on to the campus of Kyushu University because of this lingering hostility by these extremist students. Now, probably most of the people at the university couldn't have cared less about whether I was on campus or not, but the student leaders from these extremist

organizations had so cowed and intimidated the university officials that in order to keep there from being more demonstrations and more destruction and damage and riots and tear gas and all that, it was just easier for the academic authorities just to say let's not stir things up. Let's keep it the way it is and eventually time will pass; these kids will leave; things will moderate; and we can get rid of the plane, and go back to rebuilding the structure where it crashed.

There was a second campus of Kyushu University which was about two or three miles away from the main campus where the crash had occurred. I could go over there without any problem. In fact, that was the campus where there was more American studies, literature, political science, the sorts of things we were interested in anyway. The other universities, and there were two other main universities. One was called Fukuoka University and the other was Seinan Gakuin University, were much more moderate in this respect and there were no problems. Again in the same vein that some of the media representatives would be officially very critical of America but personally very cordial. Some of these professors might appear on TV or do an interview in the paper and say some very nasty things about the U.S. and the next day come to my cocktail party or have lunch at my place and be very friendly. So, in spite of all these strains in the official relationship, we maintained a very good relationship with most of the academics there.

Q: In many European and American universities, we use the stereotype that there remains a strong sort of cadre of people who subscribe to, in one extent or another, a Marxist viewpoint which supports easy criticism of the West.

BERRINGTON: No, you literally took the words out of my mouth. The economic faculty at Kyushu University I think was 100% Marxist, and many of the history professors as well had that kind of an orientation. That is part of a kind of a long academic tradition in Japan. Without getting into a long history lesson, right before the war in the 30's, many of the non Marxist academics really kind of did themselves in by, in effect, cooperating with the military officials, with the government that Japan had in WWII. It was only the Marxists and the communists that resisted much of this and were arrested, often imprisoned, and after the war, came out kind of the academic heroes of that period. So, that tradition that the whole kind of Marxist left wing tradition in Japanese academics had some thing of an honorable badge that they could all wear because they had not embarrassed themselves or postured themselves to keep in pace with military governments before the war. So you have that tradition to deal with in the academic community, but again age caught up with a lot of these people, and as time went by, more and more of these professors tended to retire or moderated their positions.

Q: Were you able to sort of turn the spotlight on to the Soviet Union and to Communist China and point out what was happening there?

BERRINGTON: Not really. I mean not because we were unable, but it was because we didn't need to. I mean the Japanese were very much aware of what was happening in China. The Russians, I mean to this day most Japanese don't like the Russians. In any poll

of public opinion in Japan, whenever they talk about who are the most beloved foreigners and who are the most hated foreigners, when it comes to the hated foreigners, the Koreans and the Russians always come out on top. They sort of vie with each other for the top position. So we didn't really have to say or do anything about the Russians to convince the Japanese that they were the bad guys. The Japanese have always had a mixed attitude toward the Chinese. I mean they see the Chinese as the sort of mother civilization of that part of the world, so there is some feeling that they should be closer and more understanding with the Chinese, but then we all know about what happened in WWII in China, so there is some lingering ill will there with the Chinese too. You know the excesses of the Mao's cultural revolution and all that were frequently reported so we didn't have to play that up. Besides I think that would have been less useful anyway. Our program in Japan was more of a positive program pointing out the benefits to the Japanese of maintaining the security relationship, of close political and economic ties with the U.S. and stressing those positive things rather than working on the negatives of China or Russia or anyplace else.

Q: Was it pretty well accepted there that you could have fun twisting the lion's tail while accepting the security protection the U.S. relationship offered? That basically saved their own kids from going into the military and saved budgetary resources. Was this pretty much an accepted good thing?

BERRINGTON: Oh most Japanese are very happy with that. First of all again a little bit of Kabuki, everything about Japan is. There were what they called the self defense forces. There was a naval self defense force, a land self defense force, the air self defense forces, and they were in effect the Japanese army, navy, and air force. But the self defense forces were quite limited in what they could do This has been one of the ongoing debates internally in Japan, just how far could the self defense forces go in pushing their mandate, in pushing their function. In those earlier years when I was in Japan, the self defense forces were really almost used primarily for disaster relief, that sort of thing. You know, a flood comes along and they were sent down to take care of it. Most of the kids that would go into the self defense forces were not your high fliers. They were the ones that didn't do very well academically or maybe didn't complete school, or farming kids that were very conservative in their outlook, and maybe still thought of the military as being a worthy profession. But for most people it is off to a good school, while for most of the country the self defense forces are really a kind of second rate operation. As a result they were very happy to have the umbrella of protection from the United States rather than having to rely on their own forces which not too many years before had caused the grief and tragedy of WWII. Everything when it comes to Japan still today, you know the two absolutely crucial events were the closing of the country during its Tokugawa period and WWII. Those two events really inform so much of Japanese attitude, behavior and still have formed much of what they say and do.

Q: Speaking of a closed society, how difficult was in to operate in Japan? You might know the language, but was it either hard to make contact or understand how the society operated?

BERRINGTON: I was lucky in that I had studied in Japan, and had more than an FSI language ability. So, it was easier for me to move around. I have to add one other…and probably the sociologists will think I am nuts, but one other factor which I think often accounted for my success in the country, and that is I am only 5 feet 5 inches tall. I could literally look at the Japanese in the eye and I would not intimidate. I mean many of the officers at the embassy would be six foot or more and would be literally overwhelming physically. The Japanese are very conscious of their shortened stature and their small physique. The idea of getting a foreigner who was the same size, I think, was probably much easier for them. A third element was the fact that I was a bachelor. Incidentally Jerry Sutton was also a bachelor. Japan is a great society for, well I think even today, but even more so back then, it was basically a male society. This meant going out drinking, yukking it up with the guys at night, and since I didn't have a wife or family that felt obligated to spend my evenings or weekends with, it was easy for me to join the gang on any kind of events that were happening. So, obviously my knowledge of Japanese history and my Japanese studies in school, and my previous time there as a student, all of this had sensitized me to a lot of other things as well.

The Japanese society was very dependent on codes, you know gestures, body language, all of that. Much of that I had instinctively picked up over the years, so it was easy for me operate within the society. Now having said that, one of the things for many people to spend a lot of time there, it is very frustrating, is that you are always regarded as a gaijin. Gaijin is the Japanese word for foreigner. It literally means outside person. If you meet a Japanese for the first time, and you were to say something like “Hello, my name is…, how do you do.” It doesn't matter whether you said it with the klutziest accent or whether you said it with an accent that made you sound like a native speaker; they would still think “Oh my God, this man speaks Japanese.” They would be astonished; nothing short of the open mouth and the look of surprise on the face, if you knew how to eat Japanese food with chopsticks. Every time I went out to dinner invariably someone would say "Oh you are very good at chopsticks." There were other little comments like that, that would constantly remind you that you were in fact an outsider. Now very few of us wanted to be Japanese. It is not that, but it is the kind of condescending attitude that many of us felt that we were kind of regarded as not much different from talking dogs. There was a constant curiosity about how we lived, what our homes were like, our attitudes about this and that because we were curiosities.

Q: How much of their understanding was formed by TV and the movies?

BERRINGTON: Unfortunately, and I don't think that has changed much over the years, very much. I mean a lot of it was formed by TV and the movies. You know, all foreigners were blond, beautiful, tall, rich, prone to violence. All those stereotypes were closely held. That was one of the things we had to keep chipping away at, those stereotypes. Well, maybe there was a kernel of truth to some of them, by and large they were not very accurate. It was a constant effort. We are talking about 1969-'73 period. Even 1993 when I left Japan 20 years later much of that was still the same. A story that I used to tell was

when I was a student in Japan in 1960-'61, I had a Japanese, what they call a guarantor, somebody who signed the papers and make sure if I got in financial trouble or whatever, he would take care of it. He probably knew me as well as anybody. He had studies at Antioch College in Ohio, was fluent in English, was a very intellectual and sophisticated guy. Every time I would see him even if it was, well not every time. Say if I had gone away for a few years and come back to Japan and we would get together for dinner or something, invariably he would start out, "Oh your Japanese is so good," and "Oh you can use chopsticks." You know I would often sit there and think even somebody like this? We have to go through kind of these initial steps of proving who you are. It could be very frustrating.

Q: Perhaps not when you were first there, but one of the most revolutionary things that America has been pushing by example and otherwise is a progressive view of the role of women. Were we doing anything either consciously or unconsciously on that?

BERRINGTON: Yes. When Reischauer was ambassador [April 1961 to August 1966], he brought out a young woman to be a women's affairs officer at the embassy, much in the same way I was supposed to be a student affairs officer. That was a position that was kept in the embassy for a number of years. Of course, if we were bringing out speakers or experts in any field, we always thought we were kind of getting a twofer if we were able to recruit not just an expert but also an expert who maybe happened to be female, or a black or something else that showed in America there was a greater equality of opportunity. So we tried to send messages in more ways than...

Q: I would think that sometimes if we are trying to send a message, we only satisfying ourselves. In other words let's say you put a woman or a black into the Japanese society to lecture on environmental affairs or Melville or something like that. Would the Japanese make the connection that these are really experts and all or would they think they were being...

BERRINGTON: Yes, I think they did, and the reason they did was, it took me awhile to figure this out, but the Japanese had long since come to the conclusion that we, the Americans, were different. By being different, we could do things like appoint blacks or women to important positions or they could rise up in the system to become experts in their various fields, and they could still be listened to and regarded just as authoritatively as if the person were a white man. They didn't necessarily make the next logical conclusion that gee we should do that here too. I think many of my colleagues were hoping that they were making that step. I doubt if they were. Of course, the women's movement or civil rights movement, which for Japan was basically for Chinese or Koreans rather than blacks, those kinds of movements did move along farther as time went by. At this time in late 1960s early 1970s there was not much evidence of any kind of movement in Japan on those fronts.

Q: What about were you getting any reflections from Japanese women about "Gee I wish I had more opportunity" and that sort of thing, or was this not something they had expressed to you?

BERRINGTON: Yes. Many of the Japanese would tell us things that they would not tell each other. Again because we were outsiders, because they probably knew we would not be passing this on, and simply because we were not part of the system. It's like they let their hair down or speak up in front of us without fear of any kind of embarrassment from their colleagues or their family or friends or whatever. So, yes, I would hear a lot of this from others, particularly from women about how they wished they had as many opportunities or as much power as American women. But then of course, there were other Japanese women who would kind of engage in the usual kind of mythology that we-Japanese-women-have-more-power-than-American-women so we don't need to be taking the kinds of steps that American women are. Frankly I regarded that as excuses for those women who didn't want to see the change or had problems dealing with reality.

Q: What about Koreans there?

BERRINGTON: Well Koreans are of course, the ethnic minority group that is most discriminated against and at the bottom of the rung of the ladder. There is a large Korean community especially in places like Kyushu, and in the other major cities. Many of them were basically in professions that were kind of left for the economic low classes. Those Koreans that did achieve and were able to kind of make the leap into the Japanese mainstream usually did so with some risk because they had to either hide the fact they were Korean by taking on a Japanese name or kind of concealing their past, or just by kidding themselves that they had become Japanese when in fact they still were Korean. It was a sad story for many of them. Even more unfortunate of course, was what they called the untouchable class, the "eta" or burakumin of Japan who basically were the sort of like the untouchable caste of India. These were a much smaller minority, but they were still there. They were different from the Koreans in that they were ethnic Japanese which is very astonishing. How they came to be regarded as kind of a non class an untouchable class is one of the great mysteries of Japanese history. It is assumed that many of them were butchers or did those professions that involved unclean activities hundreds of years ago, tanning of hides, burying the dead. Over the generations the families that did those sorts of things just became tagged with that untouchable social stigmatization, and just over the years were unable to escape beyond that.

I had one absolutely astonishing experience in Fukuoka once. As a bachelor and wanting to get out and around, I had a few bars in Fukuoka that I used to frequent. I can remember one night I was at one of these bars and as was often the case, when they see a single foreigner sitting there talking Japanese to the bartender whatever, curiosity is aroused. Another guy sitting at the bar came up to me and started asking me questions, who was I and so forth and so on. He said, "Well let me take you to my bar." We went to his place which turned out to be kind of a night club with lots of hostesses, women sitting around. I could tell that he was a kind of an uneducated lower class type of person, buy you know,

it was fun meeting people of all types. The night club was a bit of a cheesy place but, frankly when you are a foreigner, those kinds of experiences are interesting and amusing. I didn't mind going to things like that. At one point he got up and left to go to the bathroom. The hostess who was sitting closest to me turned to me and said in Japanese, "Did you know that your friend is an untouchable?" I was absolutely astonished. I didn't know that. I couldn't tell just by looking at them so I said, "No, I had no idea." She said, "Oh, yes, he is a regular here and we all like him very much but I wasn't sure if you knew this." I said, "Okay, that's very interesting. If he is an untouchable, why are you so clearly friendly with him?" The young woman said, "Oh, Japanese women like untouchable men because," and she took her fingers and put them way up, "they have big ones." I was absolutely astonished. I thought Margaret Mead where are you tonight. The idea of a discriminated ethnic minority class having this kind of sexual prowess. I have always remembered that experience. That was so indicative of the whole issue of a kind of lower class or forbidden fruit, that sort of thing.

Q: Well did we get involved at all in saying "gee you should be nicer to the Koreans or the untouchables or whomever?"

BERRINGTON: Let's face it, USIS Japan, USIS any country is in the business of forming, shaping public opinion. We have limited resources and limited ability to do this. How do you do this? You do it through the gatekeepers of the opinion formation process of a country. You try to reach those people who will be in a position to make the decisions or be in a position to influence those who make the decisions. So what we are talking about are the media of course, the academics, the teachers, the professors, the politicians who make the pronouncements, the intellectuals, the artists who write or do things that are regarded as important voices in the community, those kinds of community leaders. The ethnic minorities or the untouchables certainly didn't fall in that category, and they weren't even a large enough ethnic minority to be a factor in any of the various equations of the U.S.-Japan political, economic, or security relationship. If they had been, then I am sure we might have wanted to do something with them, but no they were just a very small blip on any radar screen if even a blip at all.

Q: This is a time of considerable activity on the part of President Nixon and Henry Kissinger and all. How was this playing down where you were, or did it? I was wondering about the opening of China while you were there. Did you have that Nixon shock too?

BERRINGTON: Well, yes, there were two major body blows to the U.S.-Japan relationship. One was the oil shock which was basically a problem of oil prices and oil supply from the Middle East. The other was the so called Nixon shock which was the opening of China. In both of these cases, the U.S. did not give the Japanese the kind of advance notice or any kinds of consultative briefing that they expected to receive and that they thought they deserved as our so called leading ally in the whole east Asian area. So particularly the China visit was a very humiliating experience for the Japanese leadership because we had not given them the kind of advance word that they expected they would

get. We were constantly trying to explain that and deal with that, and that unfortunately for the Japanese was a bad thing. You can hardly make a good thing out of a bad thing.

Q: I heard, and this may be self justification, that there was a certain amount of premeditation in doing this because it was hard to find somebody in the Japanese government that you could talk to who wouldn't immediately share it with everybody else who would share it with everybody. In other words it is this consentative type of government which means that you can't really tip somebody off early. Is that valid or not?

BERRINGTON: I have heard that one before obviously. That was often used as a justification at the time. I mean not an official justification. It was batted about informally. That was very hard for me to deal with too because basically I was in Kyushu. I wasn't dealing with central government officials. I had no idea whether the central government was as much of a fizz of information as people said it was. I mean there was clearly some truth in that notion, but it seems to me that this was a major policy shift, and we certainly paid a price of trust and closeness in the government for a long time after because of that. It is hard for me to second guess.

Q: What about, and I have heard you keep talking about the central government, but also how Japan works, nothing is decided here and now. It is usually in committee, by consensus. Did you run across that when you wanted to put on a program, nobody would look you in the eye and say "OK, we'll do that?"

BERRINGTON: Japan is not a society marked by decisive leaders in any field. University presidents are very much members of a board rather than executives in their own right. Newspaper editors-in-chief again tend to operate within the group rather than in determining editorial policy as probably an American paper would. Certainly within the political arena, Japanese governors lacked the power that American executives would have in the states. The whole Japanese system of government was very much to use a western model was very much like what I understand France was like with all the power being in Paris and everything flows out, kind of all roads lead to Rome kind of approach. Japan is very much like that. Tokyo was where all the action was taken, and once a course of action was decided on, then there was very much a building of consensus nationwide through the networks that the LDP or other organizations have. Nothing ever changed quickly in Japan. We often used to describe it as being like a large battleship or the Titanic or some giant ocean liner. You know, you can't really turn things on a dime. It slowly moves, but the whole business of consensus building was so important there, you don't get an overnight change. The problem with that, of course, is it takes a long time. It can be very frustrating, and there is difficulty dealing with a crisis or really urgent issues. The good news is, of course, that once consensus had been formed, the whole nation is literally mobilized, or the whole organization. Let's not even say nationwide, just say a corporation or university or whatever, that whole organization is mobilized to do whatever needs to be done. Then you are less likely to have the kind of backbiting or sniping or fractious disagreement, but consensus building does take time.

Q: As the USIA representative, I imagine you would be dealing with artists, the artistic community. What is in it for the United States to deal with the artistic community in Japan?

BERRINGTON: Well the same in any country. Artists are frequently seen as non-political, non-ideological, as sort of neutral observers of events. They are seen as intellectuals. They are seen as people who call it like it is. Because of their artistic achievement, they occupy a special niche within the society. So if, as was often the case on Japanese TV or in a Japanese newspaper, if so and so is being interviewed, or is in a discussion about what ever the topic might be, it might be an artistic issue or a local issue, it was not unusual for something involving U.S.-Japanese affairs to come up and he would be outspoken. Very often they have thoughts about these things. Very few of them would say Oh I am just an artist and I don't think about that. It doesn't work that way. They usually do have an opinion, and it is probably better to have a lot of those guys on your side or if not on your side, at least have them understand better the issues or the relationships that are so important for both countries. So they would certainly be part of what we would call our target audience. This could be anything from musicians to dancers to painters to writers to pop stars. You name it. We did not go in for celebrities cultivating just for the good of saying a celebrity. It was really more to make them better understand what the whole kind of fabric of U.S.-Japan relations was about. You know to be sure, if we had not done it, or if we had not talked to them that much, they would kind of feel like they were left out. Particularly in a town like Fukuoka which was our regional center, and with the consulate and the American Center being major players on the local scene, if we had totally ignored them, they would probably wonder why? Why didn't we include them in things we were doing?

Another element in all this of course is that to talk to these people, very often you had to do things that would interest them. I mean I didn't just walk up to a sculptor and say let's talk about nuclear ship visits and start talking. You had to probably have an American sculptor in town to talk about maybe issues of common interest, and then at the time if it were appropriate or something came up, then you might edge into some of these areas. So it was very important for us to be seen as the kind of society that had the values that put culture and the arts and intellectualism and all of that high on our list as well. It's an area that I don't think Americans quite understand, but many non-Americans regard a country's culture, it arts, its literature, its intellectual community as something of an indicator of the worth of the civilization of that country. If we as the U.S. government are not doing more to promote our own cultural activities, our writers, our composers, whatever, we would be seen as maybe not quite as worthy an ally or we are not the substantive society or nation that is worth spending so much of their own political or economic capital on. It made up a better, a society of better nations to them, and so, you know, it was very much a two way street.

Q: I would assume there wouldn't be quite the same hang up that we get sometimes in Europe where some Europeans, this is dying but, would take the stand, Americans have

no culture. I suppose the Japanese look upon what we do as exotic or something, or did they?

BERRINGTON: That was one of the nicer things about being in Japan. The Japanese were absolutely obsessed with anything that went on in the United States. They were deeply interested in everything we did whether it was in social issues or…

BERRINGTON: …or cultural issues in the United States, largely because they saw us as kind of the laboratory in which things happened, and if these events or trends were successful, invariably they would come to Japan as well.

So if it was like women's rights happening in the U.S. they figured five or eight years down the road it would be happening in Japan as well and the same with any cultural activities or artistic activities. So anything that we would bring to Japan in our exhibit or musical performance or dance or whatever was flocked to by the local community. They really wanted to see what's up in America. If we had not done anything at all, they would have wondered why in the hell we were not doing it, but when we did it, they were always there to take a look and find out for themselves what was happening in America. So, yes, working with the cultural community was extremely important. Let's face it, you can deal with the bureaucrats, the politicians, and the businessmen for a lot of things, but after awhile some of the cultural types were more fun, more interesting, and it was like adding the spice or the salt and pepper to your stew. If you had a party or an event going on, throwing in some of those types, it was more fun for the Japanese to see: "Oh look, there is so and so the well known writer or the famous potter," "Oh he is here tonight too." It added to that sort of class or status of your position in the community to have those people there.

Q: What about leader grants, sending people to the United States? Did we have much of a program and did you get any feel?

BERRINGTON: We had an International Visitor program which is what I assume you are talking about. In Fukuoka alone we used to nominate about, oh gosh I think we used to have at least six or eight a year and maybe even more. The Japan program was one of the largest in the world. The embassy in Tokyo was very good at making sure that all of the regional centers got their fair share of nominations. That was very important because the way the Japan system worked, particularly with a lot of these nationwide institutions, whether it was Asahi Shimbun the big newspaper or whether it was a corporation like Mitsubishi or one of the political parties like the LDP or the JSP. Many of these people got their start in one of these regional centers. As they would rise within the system, first in the regional center and then maybe in Osaka and then finally when they hit the big time in Tokyo, it was much easier to contact and meet these people out in the Fukuoka or Sapporo or Kyoto rather than once they had gotten to Tokyo, where they would be just too damn busy to do a lot of the things we wanted to do with them. So it was very important for us out in places like Fukuoka too, to have these contacts and nominate these people. Many of the people, whether it was members of the diet, politicians or the young

journalists that I knew have now risen to extremely senior important positions in their organization.

Q: Were you pleased with the way the program is run and experiences of the people coming back?

BERRINGTON: Oh of course. The IV program was over the years when USIS would go through one of those spasms of budget cutting where you had to rank what are the best things we do and the worst things we do. The IV program would consistently come out on top as one of the best things we ever did. So no that was always very well run, very fruitful, very positive. In leaping forward, one time when I was in Tokyo for example, I sent the deputy governor of the prefecture in which Yokohama is located. Yokohama is now I think the third largest city in the country. The deputy governor was one of those left wing politicians that had kind of grown up within the very Marxist kind of anti American tradition. When we sent him to the United States, he came back he was a changed man. I mean he was one of the most dramatic examples I have seen come through that IV program, and literally had his attitude do an about face about market economies and security relationship and all that, just go 180 degrees as a result of the IV experience. So yes it was an extremely successful program.

Q: Is there anything we should cover here, any events or issues that maybe we haven't talked about?

BERRINGTON: Well I have been talking mainly about Fukuoka because that was where we were based, it is the largest city, but to a degree the same thing was happening in the other cities of Kyushu. Jerry Sutton and I would try to get to places like Kumamoto or Nagasaki or Kagoshima. I mean big cities but they just didn't have an American Center library or they didn't have a consulate. So we were doing much the same kind of outreach to the political leaders, the media leaders, the academics, just not on as frequent or regular basis.

Often, even though we might be in a place like Nagasaki only say four times a year, the results of those visits could be extremely important because our visit would be like VIP's coming down from the regional center. Another important development during my period in Fukuoka was when we changed the name from the USIS office there from the American Cultural Center to the American Center. That was a major kind of I guess you would say policy decision by the top people at USIS in Tokyo. This was based on the decision that the USIS program in Japan had literally not changed since the occupation period. At the same time, Japan itself was changing by leaps and bounds, and it was time to make our programs far more modern and more welded to contemporary society than it had been. It had gotten pretty cobwebby and dusty and all of that. So we changed it. The one way to show this change was the name change from American Cultural Center to American Center. One of the reasons we did that was to show that there was more to the American Center than just culture. I mean we were heavily involved in the policy issues of trade and military relations and all of that. But also because we were instituting what

were in those days, now this was I think 1971-1972, some pretty radical modern electronic equipment like the old fax machine which is kind of dated nowadays, but in those days we were using fax machines to transmit back and forth between the Embassy and our Center which enabled us to get policy statements from the ambassador or from people literally into the hands of people instantaneously.

We were also, and this was important, we were being much more attentive to the audiences we were dealing with. In the old days, we were sort of happy to have almost anybody come into the Center. We were happy to be giving out our policy paper to almost anybody. You know, you work for the newspaper, fine let's give it to him. Now if he was in the distribution office of the newspaper, so what? He didn't have much to do with policy issues, but because he was with the newspaper, we would give it to him. Well we were much more focused in our efforts, so as to get things into the hands of the real political, economic, cultural, military movers; those kinds of hands rather than just what I called the "Friends of America." We were more purposefully going out and looking for target audience members, particularly those people who were not true believers necessarily.

In a way, we were making our own lives more difficult because we were trying to do more than we were doing when we were the old American Cultural Center and just sort of dealing with whatever came in off the sidewalk. So it was a much more aggressive, strident, focused, targeted kind of program. For example, (Herman) Melville, you mentioned that earlier. We didn't do anything about Melville. We stopped doing nice comfortable things like Melville. Instead we started doing things like Saul Bellow. The idea was to make the program as contemporary as possible. We figured everybody already knew about the Civil War or knew about Nathaniel Hawthorne and that sort of thing, but how many people knew about the current developments in American dance or how many people knew about those American writers who were getting the book awards and all of that, probably not so much. So we were making it a much more contemporary and focused operation in our program, as well as our audiences. That was a major change because for many USIS people, this meant change.

It meant getting off your can, getting out with new material and doing something; and we were instituting some accountability as well. I mean if you didn't deal with some of these people, you weren't doing what you should be doing. We were actually recording the idea of putting this in quantifiable terms. It went a bit overboard at times, but we were trying to record how much we actually did see the professors of international relations or how many people from the local legislature did we send off on an IV program, as opposed to how many people were friends of ours. It was a major institutional change for USIS Japan. This was a change incidentally which then kind of set the mark for many other USIS programs around the world.

Q: You were sort of in the lead then?

BERRINGTON: Yes, very much. We changed the name of the library from the American Cultural Center Library to what we called Infomat – "info" came from information and "mat" came from automatic. You could automatically get the latest, most relevant kind of information. So it was a bit of a trendy thing. We put in super graphics in the buildings to kind of liven and make them with more verve and style. In many respects it was very successful.

Q: Where was the drive coming from?

BERRINGTON: This was coming from the PAO in Tokyo, Alan Carter, who was one of the great thinkers and kind of conceptualizers of USIS. A man who created a lot of enemies because he did upset apple carts.

He was somebody who had never had any Japan experience before he got that job, the senior USIS job in Tokyo. Many of the kind of old Japan hands were immediately against him because they didn't like what he was doing. So in their criticism they tried to use the idea that he was inexperienced in Japan.

Many of us were unsure about what was happening. I think many of the younger officers were quickly won over. Carter did a fantastic job of turning that post around and making us the kind of vanguard of what USIS should be doing worldwide.

Q: Did the trade issue come up? I mean were you playing that because we were beginning to be worried about the deficit and also be worried about the fact that the Japanese market was hard to penetrate.

BERRINGTON: Oh yes. The trade issue is one of those things that never goes away. When baseball bats two years ago or grapefruits this year or automobile parts two years later or lawyer-age in the next decade, we were always trying to open the Japanese market to whatever the American product was that we felt was being advanced. You know, that sounds like a silly group of things in terms of baseball bats to lawyers but these were the things we were talking about.

Q: This is very much the essence of what our diplomatic missions were about. For example, President Nixon came into office at the time you were in Japan and he owed his election to winning in places in the South which in those days were dependent on textiles. Did your work cover trying to explain our textile policy?

BERRINGTON: Oh yes, textile policy was a major trade issue throughout the late 1960s early 1970s period. I could have referred to that along with baseball bats and grapefruits, but textiles were constantly coming up. For me in Fukuoka, probably security issues were paramount and then I would say trade. In other places where there weren't so many bases close by, probably security issues were paramount and then maybe trade. Trade issues were an ongoing continuous thread all through my Japan experience.

Q: Today is May 8, 2000. Robin you are off to Tokyo 1973. That tour was from 1973 to when?

BERRINGTON: 1975. In fact I wasn't even supposed to go to Tokyo. I was assigned to Lagos, Nigeria. Quite frankly I was not interested at all in going to Lagos, Nigeria then or now.

Q: Was that as a result of Secretary Kissinger's GLOP [Global Outlook Program where officers were assigned to areas for which they had no background, as a way of stemming parochialism]?

BERRINGTON: Yes, exactly. I had already spent four years in Japan, two years in Thailand, so that meant six years in the area. For the personnel gurus, that was enough, so they decided to GLOP me to someplace else. We in USIS didn't use that term. That was really a State term, but the concept, the principle was the same. The PAO, a man whose name I have mentioned before, Alan Carter, as I said, he had really been there about a year I think, a year or two. He was trying to really reinvigorate, redo, modernize, update the USIS program in Japan. One of the ways he saw to do that was to retain a knowledgeable Japanese speaking, young staff rather than accept the typical personnel assignment of older or more experienced officers who were now in personnel eyes it was time for them to have a time in Japan. I don't know how Alan did it, and frankly I never asked him to do it. He told me that he would check into this and would I be interested. I said, "Yes I would be," and that was for me to stay another two years in Japan. So he must have talked to somebody back in Washington, and they got the Lagos assignment turned around, and suddenly there I was going from Fukuoka to Tokyo for an additional two years, which would have made a total of it six years in Japan. The assignment was to be what was called the program officer or the program development officer; the title kind of depended on which business card I had printed up at the time.

In effect the job was the ACAO, Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer for USIS's program development. What that meant was organizing the speaker programs, the seminars, developing what Alan liked to call a packaged program which was…you identified say four or five program themes for the year. Say one was opening the Japanese market to American investments. Let's say another was maintaining the U.S.-Japan security treaty. Let's say another was demonstrating American achievement in science and other domestic activities. Let's say another was showing to the Japanese the innovation and imagination of contemporary American art. Let's say another might be proving to the Japanese the value of a democratic society, what is happening in American society in terms of civil rights, human rights, all of that. Now I picked those out of the air, but those were concrete examples of some of the things we were trying to make a central part of our program in USIS Japan in the early to mid 1970s. The concept was the program development office, of which I was in charge, would identify the ways in which we could support those program themes i.e. getting speakers, getting presentation books to give to people who might or might not have participated in the speaker program on the same themes. Perhaps even books written by the speaker. Not just taking any old speaker that USIA would send

down the pike but actually identifying the best people in those fields, requesting them by name to USIA in Washington, having them come to Japan, not just for one or two days, but often for two or three weeks to go around to all of the six USIS centers, producing letterhead on which invitations would go out on which bibliography would be printed, identify the bibliography from the USIS library, send out if there any U.S. government publications send them out in advance of the program. In other words it was sort of a multi pronged approach in which we would try to support or promote that program theme through a variety of program tools.

I would work with the press office to make sure that they would be trying to place items in the papers or provide opportunities for interviews on television on the same theme. I used to call it the sort of the Mount Everest approach. A month or two before the arrival of the speaker and the big seminar, maybe a whole day long seminar, we would have small events, kind of preliminary events. These events were the foothills of the Himalayas. Maybe a month or a couple of weeks before the event, we would be doing something a little bit bigger or more splashy. In other words, leading up to the big thing, the Mount Everest, the big seminar which might have been in Tokyo. It might have been in Osaka. It could have been in any one of our center cities. We would usually invite two or three people, specialists from the selected field. All two or three would participate in the seminar or big event whatever it might be, but then after that, they would go around. The team would break up so to speak and they would go around to the other center cities speaking on the same topic but maybe being a solo performer instead of the whole team.

For those people that we felt were really important out in the other center cities like Fukuoka or Sapporo or Nagoya or whatever, we would sometimes invite them in, pay their way, and have these Japanese lights actually participate in the big seminar that might be in Osaka or Tokyo. In that way we would kind of get a national impact, because very often these would be Japanese people in the papers or television or scholars who had some caché.

These would be people from our target audiences from each of these center cities. So a national conference like that would insure that the theme message would get out. Then we had an angle to all of this as well. Very often that person, if he or she had been invited in to a big seminar in Tokyo or Osaka, by the time the team of speakers split up and went out to the various center cities to do their solo performances on this issue, that person might then be the moderator for the program in the city when that person came through. So it was very much an organizational, planning kind of operation. When I had been in Fukuoka, I was very much on the front line. I was dealing with Japanese audiences, using my Japanese, being the spokesperson for the consulate, going out to various events. But this job in Tokyo, this planning job was basically an inside job. Most of my dealings were with the bureaucracy back in Washington or within the embassy itself trying to line up all these various materials and programming tools we had in support of the chosen theme, this particular seminar, this particular approach we had to the issue at hand. I must say I think we set the standard for a lot of USIS posts in presenting a full program like that, a well rounded approach to what USIS posts for many years had been doing but not in quite

so planned and organized a fashion. We used to really anger USIA in Washington because we kept insisting on really high level important speakers. We wouldn't settle for just the familiar name and face. We often used to joke that there were a lot of kind of old time speakers who had been at the trough of USIA for years and years. Whenever Joe Blow wanted to take his trip to Europe or Asia, he would just call up USIA and they would send out cables and arrange for speaking programs and what, you name the issue. Whether it was relevant to their country plan or not is something else. We would not settle for that. We had to break a few eggs to make the omelet that we were trying to make.

Q: Do you have any idea of some of the people who came?

BERRINGTON: We had senators, we had congressmen. We had for example Herb Stein from the council of economic advisors in one of our economic programs. We had, arms control was an area that we did a lot in. Most of the big names, the names just, I'll have to go back and check on those.

Q: How did you find that this interface worked, given the cultural differences? Americans aren't too aware of how the Japanese approach issues, how did you find this worked?

BERRINGTON: It worked very well. The Japanese are…well first of all there are potential problems on both sides. Fortunately, the Japanese are very much into what you call a study type of activity. They are used to coming to a lecture or a speech by somebody with their little notebooks and pencils ready to take notes. It is almost as if they never left college or the university. They are always in a note taking mood. Whenever we would put on one of these presentations, it was never a problem getting an audience.

The more they became familiar with the idea that we were bringing in not just well known, name people but people who were extremely knowledgeable and accomplished in their fields. The more the word got around that you had to be at the American Center to find out what was going on, the less problem we had getting the kinds of quality audience we wanted. Before this program started, before Carter really instituted some of these reforms, too many American Centers in Japan has sort of relied on what I used to call the camp followers, the people who would just come to the American Center because it was heated in the winter or air conditioned in the summer. You got a free drink after the program was over. You know, the sort of people that would just hang around embassy or consulate operations like that. We tended to dismiss that and really went after getting, as I said before, significant, influential people in the media, political, business, academic, and other important communities. Because the Japanese were used to this kind of format of a speaker and an audience, they would come. Now the problem however, of course, is that most of our invited American speakers, not all, but most of the people we had come in couldn't speak any Japanese. Of course, the audience was largely a Japanese speaking audience. Some of the people in the audience could speak some English, but not well enough to really engage in a high level discussion on say arms control or trade negotiations or whatever. So everything had to be done through interpreters.

There was always that question of whether you do simultaneous interpretation or what we would call consecutive interpreting. Of course simultaneous is when one is going on the same time the speaker is speaking and the audience is wearing earphones. Consecutive speaking was where the interpreter would sit at the table with the speaker; the speaker would speak for two or three minutes; the interpreter would be taking notes furiously, and then he would speak for two or three minutes. The speaker would speak for two or three minutes and then the interpreter would speak for two or three minutes. It was always a debate as to which was the better way to do it. The simultaneous certainly provided a better flow and more spontaneity, except there was always that issue of how much accuracy because of just the need to keep up with the speaker and occasionally making an error, and how much would sometimes get left out. Sometimes the real flavor of it might not be there because the speaker was a fast talker and it was difficult for the interpreter to keep up. Consecutive was probably much better for accuracy and reliability, but it did break up the flow of conversation and for those people who might speak some English, they might tune out for two or three minutes. It was a little bit more awkward. So from the Japanese side there was always that problem of interpreting.

Another problem for the Japanese side is that we were interested in dialogue. Now Japanese from high school, university days on, the whole idea is for the lecturer, the professor, the teacher, the sensei in Japanese, he or she. I shouldn't say she, it is usually he. He would come in, give the lecture; the students would take the notes, lecture is over; students leave the hall, end. Questions? No way! Exchange of ideas? Forget it! It is just not part of the Japanese system. What we were trying to do with the American Center programs is to encourage that kind of dialogue. In fact, we made a point of not calling these things lectures. We had another Japanese word that we used which was more an exchange of ideas rather than lecture. For many Japanese it took them awhile to get used to this. The idea of the speaker speaking for maybe 15-20-30 minutes and then the next hour and a half – for a two hour program, for example, the next hour and a half would be Q&A (questions and answers) or commentary from the audience with the speaker responding. For many Japanese that was never done. Once they got used to it, it was OK.

But the kinds of audiences we would bring together, well occasionally it might be a media only audience or an academic audience or a "politician only" audience. I mean one time I brought Mayor Koch out from New York. We just got him together with a bunch of young politicians. So that we might do a very specialized audience for something like that. But most of the time it was a mixed audience of all of these categories. The Japanese are very conscious about who in the audience is, well getting back to hierarchy, who is the sort of a senior group, who is the junior group, who is the in between group, who is higher than me, who is lower than me. It would be seen as very unsettling or rude if maybe one of the junior persons was the first one to speak up, to raise his hand and say "Mr. Professor, I would like to ask you about." So whenever the presentation part of it was finished, there was always this, you could see a kind of rustling in the audience. People would kind of be nervously looking around in their seats. Everybody is trying to

figure out who is the most senior, most respected person to kind of break the ice and get the discussion going. Once that got settled, then things would usually...

Q: Did you ever load the thing by going up to the top dog in the audience...

BERRINGTON: Does a bear do what he does in the woods? Of course, but it still was no guarantee that it would always work out that way. No there is a Japanese word called sakura which is the word for cherry blossom. In terms of audiences, I guess you would say the claque or the claque in question or whatever, that is called sakura in Japanese. So we would sprinkle our audience with all sorts of sakuras to make sure that. You know I would pull somebody aside and say, “Make sure you ask about this or don't hesitate to sort of get things going.” So those were the kinds of challenges in organizing presentations for a Japanese audience. First of all, to engage in dialogue, secondly, to break through - with our assistance of course the interpreters - the language barrier as well.

On the American side, there were always the problems that, well first of all just in dealing with Japanese behavior at events like this. Now this may sound rather silly, but the Japanese have a habit of when they are at a program like this, even though they have got their little notebook and pencil or pen ready, very often they will sit there with their head down and their eyes closed, and it looks like they are falling asleep. In fact, they are not. I guess it is just a way for them particularly they are listening to interpreters. I guess it is a way for them to kind of really concentrate and get the message. Frequently after the presentation American speakers would talk to me and say "Oh boy did I bomb. I mean look they are all asleep in the program." As a result, one of the things I would always do in advance of the program, and this was a very important part of the planning kind of preparation process is I would brief the speakers on just how the Japanese behave in these kinds of programs. Another problem for me and the speakers was the Japanese seldom asked a direct question. That is almost considered rude. So what they would do is they would make usually a long winded statement about something, and maybe there would be a slight question at the end of this. If you were lucky there was something with a question mark at the end of this. But more typical would be this kind of long winded statement, and the implication would be what do you think of what I have just said. Americans even with the interpreter because the Japanese would be doing this in Japanese and the interpreter would then be rehearsing the process back to the speaker. Even with the interpreters in tow like that, a lot of the Americans would find this difficult to kind of figure out what the speaker was really after. The Japanese as a people are not given to much public displays of emotion or feeling or anything like that. So that it would be hard to get any kind of feedback from the audience if you were really doing well.

There wouldn't be, for example I would tell the speakers don't even bother with the jokes. I know that things go over well in America, but I assure you here most jokes just won't make it. Some of them would take my advice and wouldn't bother, and others would brush me off.

My point was maybe the audience wouldn't understand the joke because of the interpreting, but more importantly, this was supposed to be an educational serious occasion. Professors, learned people in this culture don't make jokes. So anybody who tried to do it would just be, you know, it just wouldn't go over. People weren't expecting it and didn't know how to react to it. This would often discombobulate the American speakers. If they weren't getting any feedback from the audience that things were going well and that there were some kind of response. So there were those rough edges. Then also I think as much as Americans would study up on the issues, and these were all very specialized, accomplished people in their fields,…as much as they would study up, and we would often before they came to Japan, would send them a list of things they might want to read and familiarize themselves with. Even if they did that before they came to Japan, once they got there, they would find the real Japanese attitudes and feelings about things so different from what they had expected. from the papers that often they would have to totally tailor their remarks or change their presentations.

Q: How would they find this out, the difference? I mean would you sort of be somebody with you explaining how, I mean did you sort of have to bring yourself up to speed on the issues?

BERRINGTON: Well first of all, I said the briefing was a very important part of this whole preparation process. I don't mean just the briefing a half hour before the program begins, which we did of course. Also we would arrange briefings with embassy officers in the various fields literally within a day after these people would arrive and got over the jet lag, we would schedule a full day of embassy briefings or briefings from other American and Japanese specialists in the country who would kind of bring them up to a kind of working level of how the Japanese understood or regarded these issues or how the American government wanted the issues presented. Of course the speaker was then free to use or disregard any of that information as he or she saw fit.

But probably as much as that, even more important was the eventual feedback they would get from their first presentation or two. They would figure out gosh they really do think that or they really don't understand that. It wasn't just at formal presentations because we would always as part of this package program process; we would usually arrange media interviews before or after a major seminar. There were always representation gatherings, maybe a lunch or a dinner or a reception where the drinks and the food would certainly be abundant. The Japanese are, things always worked much more smoothly with a few drinks. They relax; they kind of let their hair down. It just is a much more sociable and candid occasion id there is a bit of liquor around. So, we would make sure that those kinds of opportunities were there for the speakers as well. In fact, let's face it, these programs even though it was allegedly bringing in the Americans to deal with the Japanese, to give them our views about positions, to present them with the latest information about X or Y. A lot of this was allow the Japanese giving it back to the Americans for the Americans to take back to the United States to their various constituencies there. So we saw ourselves very much as conduits for a two-way exchange

of information, and given the high level and influential nature of the people who were participating on both sides, this was a significant learning experience.

Q: Did the Japanese have anything comparable to this in the United States?

BERRINGTON: They do, but it is not nearly as…the quantity is not as great. One of the big things we used to astonish our Japanese audiences with was that, let's say we did a program on arms control and we brought out three speakers. One of the speakers might be opposed to U.S. government policy. We would purposely go for a range of views. We weren't just trying to get the toadies or the kind of knee jerk U.S. policy supporters. We wanted the specialists in the field. I should add, we did this in cooperation with a very important institution so that they would be our co-sponsors, our co-hosts. It would give it more credibility to do it that way. But then the Japanese audience would then be very surprised that people, organizations as important as the embassy and our co-hosts would literally sponsor a program featuring people that were opposed, that were critical.

I must say it was not infrequent that our embassy colleagues would have snit fits about this as well. And people back in Washington would say, "Are you really sure you that?' We'd say, "Yes, we were really sure." We had done our homework. We had decided these were the people we wanted, and we were looking for a presentation that reflected the range of views in the United States. You can't understand the dialogue in the U.S.; you can't understand the political debate in the U.S. unless you know what is happening on both sides of the issues. This seems common sense. This is basic to the whole process of learning. I don't know why people would get upset about this, but some did.

Q: I am looking at the dates you were there, 1973-1975. We were going through probably the greatest constitutional crisis since the Civil War i.e.. Watergate. How about that?

BERRINGTON: Well, we did not program specifically on Watergate. I mean there was really no need to do something on that issue per-se because it was being treated daily in the papers. You know kind of like Monica Lewinski, there was a certain amount of Watergate fatigue setting in. But what we would do is we would program on the more fundamental idea of say impeachment. How the impeachment process works or on some of the issues in constitutional law that would affect the whole Watergate process. And people knew what we were doing. It wasn't that unclear to them. There were certain issues that quite frankly there wasn't much point in programming. For example, violence in America, the drug scene, why all of that is the way it is. There wasn't much we could do with that because there is not much way you can come out looking good or providing any answers that the Japanese don't already have. And besides it was only those issues that were really issues that directly affected the U.S.-Japan relationship that we were most interested in.

Q: How do you handle preachy topics which some might feel is none of our damn business, women's rights, treating minorities - which Japan had had and has a problem

with. This buzzing around in their backyard. Were you feeling these were topics that in a way affected our relationship?

BERRINGTON: In a way they did, because they would affect the whole and I guess even crime would fall into this category as well, but nevertheless we felt there was nothing we could say about crime that would make people feel better about it. I mean it is there and there is not much you can do about it. Something like women's rights or civil rights, blacks all of that, yes we could say something about it. We could demonstrate not only governmental outrage and support for progress in these fields but we could also demonstrate a kind of local level support and reasons for this. The whole point of it was we found there was a potential problem of losing confidence in America as a nation, to hold together as a nation. If you realize this was a time when there was a lot of conflicting constituencies, you know, the women, the African Americans, the pro-war, the anti-war, the abortion, the anti-abortion and all of that. America in the 1970s looked like a very fractious, divided place. Our concern was that the Japanese would lose confidence in our ability as a nation to govern ourselves and to remain a leader throughout the world. So there was a need to show that some of these issues like say the women's issue or the black or whatever was part of an ongoing process of achieving greater rights for all of our citizens and providing more democratic opportunity. If the Japanese thought gee, we could use some of the same thing here that was their conclusion. We did not make that leap. We did not say we are doing this and you ought to be doing it here, too. Of course not, that would have been interfering in domestic affairs.

Q: And these were billed as basically explaining American society.

BERRINGTON: Of course, yes. And again, you know we brought out, I mean now that we start thinking of specific areas a couple of names. In women's rights, we brought out both Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem separately. They were fantastic, you can just imagine. On African-American issues we had Mrs. Martin Luther King. We had others as well, but she came out and did a program for us. We were looking for the people, and again these are not necessarily the people who supported the government line. This period coincided with the Vietnam War, and we would often have problems. One of them, some of my speakers who really, I would say look, you are here to talk about women's rights or African-American civil rights or whatever. I said, "If somebody raises their hand and asks you a question about American relations with China or Vietnam, that is your business whether you want to answer it or not. We recommend you don't because it just opens a can of worms and you are not a specialist in this field, and that is not what the point of this program is about, but you are free to do whatever you want to do." Some of them would take that advice and would say look, I don't know a thing about Vietnam. I am not going to get into that. Others would suddenly say, well now that you mention it, yes, I think the Americans are mad dog, imperialists, suppressing the Vietnamese, or whatever it was. We would think Oooh. But invariably most of the Japanese realized that they have their people in Japan that are specialists in economics or maybe foreign policy but know nothing about issue X or Y and say silly thing there, so it didn't do much damage.

Q: I would think a subject particularly at that time, you mentioned Vietnam, would have been of major importance to us. This is a period of when they were pulling out of Vietnam. Both in Korea and Japan particularly, they were looking long and hard, and wondering if the Americans were dependable or not?

BERRINGTON: You just put your finger on the nub of it and that was Korea because by this time Vietnam was really winding down. There was still a residue of ill will, and there were still things to talk about. But the issue was if we had done this in Vietnam, are we going to do this in Korea too. We did a lot of, not aggressive programming, but we did a lot of smaller programming just to reinforce the point that look, we are in Korea. We are going to stay. We have been there since the Korean War. We have massed all those American forces. We have got too much at stake there. In spite of if you recall Jimmy Carter made a statement when he first was inaugurated or maybe during the campaign that he would withdraw the Second Division from Korea. Now that caused quite a stir.

Q: But that was a year later. I mean did the Japanese sort of as a nation or as a group see Korea not only their feelings about Koreans themselves, but see Korea as a very dangerous place if the communists were able to take over?

BERRINGTON: Well there is the old adage that Korea is a dagger aimed at the heart of Japan. Yes, I think most Japanese thought about these issues, were very concerned that there is always something ready to boil over there. Tensions were even higher back then than now. Yes, I am sure a lot of Japanese were very worried about that. But at the same time, they saw our constancy there as we assured, and we kept wanting to reassure, that we are not going to leave. We did.

Q: Were we able with this program to reach some of the audiences I think we would be interested in. You mentioned women, I am talking about influential women and people who were there, and also the young students?

BERRINGTON: Well the student audience was a big question mark for us. Obviously we wanted to get younger audiences. We were not looking for the presidents and the editors in chief or people like that when we attracted. We were really looking for what we call the next generation. Our target audiences, the key people were not the top people. I mean we had pretty much written them off, one because they were older, and two because they were just too damn busy. They couldn't afford the time to come to a lot of things we were doing or inviting them to. So we would go for the kind of mid level or slightly younger audiences. They would really be our prime audience for this sort of thing. This would include the assistant editors or as I mentioned before, the young reporters. In Fukuoka I would assemble a group of young reporters and meet with them about once every two weeks. We would have drinks, usually some snacks, and we would sit down and just talk about whatever was in the news. It was off the record, informal. They knew they couldn't quote me. I knew that there was no danger, no danger of finding something in the papers the next day. They saw it as much as a familiarization process of how the embassy thought about these things and learning for them. It would be people like that, that we

would be trying to encourage to come to these programs knowing full well that they would then when they got promoted and would move on to Tokyo, they would be in a position to do something with that.

Students were always a bit of a conundrum for us because first of all, the student audience is huge. You have got to realize that Japan is a country that values education very highly. Almost everybody goes off to university. The university system in Japan is just like everything else in Japan, it is highly structured and very hierarchical. You know, there are the top universities like Tokyo University and Kyoto University and Waseda and a few others. Then there are the mid-level universities, and then quite frankly there are the universities that are barely good enough to be called universities but they are. So given this huge student audience, how would we start attracting people? We couldn't just say, we couldn't send out you know, blanket invitations.

The way it works in Japan is that most students, there aren't things like student unions or anything where you could get the word up to people. The best way would be to attract them through student clubs. The clubs were not very well organized. They were a very difficult audience to reach, literally to reach in physical terms. One of the principles of this whole new program that Carter wanted to put into place was not only that you put out a high quality relevant program, but that also it go to the right members of the audience and not just once but repeatedly. So, we weren't inviting Mr. Tanaka once a year. We were trying to contact Mr. Tanaka once a month. If your student audience is that large, which it is. I mean even at a school like Tokyo University which is by most people's definition one of the top universities, there are thousands of students there. So how do you get back to an audience that large repeatedly? Well, you really can't is the point.

Q: In a way you were trying to pick them up I guess, once it had gotten within their career path which is a pretty good...

BERRINGTON: OK, so having come to this conclusion that as much as we would like to get to them it is pretty difficult to get to them on a timely and repeated basis, so we decided that we, you know, through the sort of ink stain or oil stain whatever your analogy, you get to the professors. The professors will get to the students; that's one way. Or you get to the students once they graduate. If they had stayed within the academic system to go to graduate school, that filters down the numbers considerably. By that time every important professor will have several graduate assistants. Now those were people we could get to, and their numbers were not so great, and they were knowledgeable about the issues, and they would come. So we would get to them that way, or we get to them you know, if they joined Mitsubishi or if they joined the Ministry of Finance you know, as the new young members of the organization, we could reach them there. We would very enthusiastically make the effort there. So we kind of discounted the student audience per-se, but we were really trying to get them as they moved into the next phase.

Q: Were there any segments of the society that you felt were either unapproachable or off limits or something?

BERRINGTON: Well, there were, as I think I mentioned last time, Japan is a government with you know, the ruling party has been the liberal democrats, the LDP. The permanent opposition was the socialists. The socialist party was split between the really left wing socialists and the right wing socialists. The right wing socialists were no problem. We could deal with them pretty quick. The left wing socialists for ideological reasons often refused to deal with us. They just didn't want to be seen with the Americans. The left wing socialists could sometimes be more rabid than some of the extremist splinter parties. The one party that by embassy dictate we avoided was the communist party, because we did not want to honor them with an invitation or give them the opportunity, the platform to say anything or do anything at an American Center or university event. Of course the Zengakuren type, you know, even though Zengakuren is a student organization, and even though it is very well known and would make a lot of noise and get attention in the papers, it was hardly a student group. I mean many Zengakuren leaders were in fact in their lower 30's. These were just kids who stayed in the system and never really graduated. They found their niche in extremist politics and that kind of student radicalism and they just hung around. We just never bothered with the Zengakuren because those people were not interested in dialogue. They were just interested in making noise and getting attention. So those were probably the only two groups that we consciously chose not to reach or just didn't think it was worth the effort.

Q: I was wondering about in Japan the court around the Emperor. Was this sort of an unapproachable area?

BERRINGTON: It is funny you asked that. I was the person in the embassy who kind of by chance just fell into becoming one of the main liaisons with the imperial family. The Emperor and his immediate family is, and I will have much more to say about this later on when my connections with them become even closer which they did in the 1980s and 1990s. The emperor and his immediate family is really non political. They don't say or do anything of a political nature. Of course that has a basis in the problems of WWII and Emperor Hirohito and the criticism about his involvement in war decision and various councils that either kept war going or ended the war so the culpability and the war guilt of that Emperor sort of made it difficult for any Emperor today to express any political views. If the Emperor did say anything of a political nature it would cause such an uproar. So the Emperor's position was basically a very symbolic one. He goes around and opens factories and you know, presides over poetry readings and very much ceremonial and harmless protocol. They are very much like the Queen of England. When is the last time you heard the Queen of England say anything political or substantive. So the imperial family we didn't really try to make any effort with. Of course for protocol reasons when the President would visit or other social reasons, yes there was a need to maintain a connection with the family, but as far as our programs were concerned, no.

Q: The greatest challenge in American diplomacy or any diplomatic establishment is between the various departments within our own government. How did you relate with the political section or other parts of the Embassy?

BERRINGTON: Pretty well. In fact I think largely because of my experience as the program officer for USIS and because of the high substantive nature of things were doing, I mean policy nature of things we were doing. As I have said before we weren't doing literary studies of Hawthorne or you now, happy events on July 4 in America. That sort of programming was long gone. We were really seen as a very integral part of the embassy process of getting the message out. I was a participant. I sat in on all of the political and economic section staff meetings, more to pick up than to give. I mean I was more interested in what the issues were for me to then go back and start thinking gee should we maybe be doing a program on that. Of course, whenever we would do something, let's say we did a program on arms control at the Center, we would make sure to include a couple of embassy staff people from the political section or the military or whatever to be there just to sit in the audience. And invariably we would have a reception afterwards, and it would give them an opportunity to meet with our audiences. Because of the kinds of high level Japanese audiences we had, the embassy people were thrilled to be there because it gave them opportunities to broaden their contacts and meet some of the new young faces in the field. I think the USIS embassy relationship must have been one of the strongest, when I say embassy I mean political and economic or Pol-Mil (political-military) that sort of thing. It was one of the strongest kind of most synergistic of any embassies I have been in. The ambassador always supported us.

In that time the Ambassador was Bob Ingersoll, who was a political appointee, had been the president of Ingersoll Rand from Chicago and was terrific. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Ingersoll presented his credentials on April 12, 1972 and departed post on November 8, 1973.] He ranks as one of the best ambassadors I have ever had, a very decent, human person, very knowledgeable about economic and trade issues, and great with the staff. He knew how to motivate and utilize his staff. He was ideal. As I say most of us regarded him extremely favorably. The ambassador was in support of this kind of a program. There might have been a few people around the Embassy who would joke, "Oh what's old useless doing." ["useless" in this context is a negative homonym in English for USIS.] But by and large I think the kind of program we were developing and putting together there came to be highly accepted by the other members of the mission.

Q: Well is there anything else we should talk about at that? It sounds like a very fruitful period.

BERRINGTON: You know it's funny, I have got notes and I have forgotten to bring them. I made notes last night and I forgot to bring them. We had a lot of high level visits. For example, Gerald Ford came out just after he became President [November18-22, 1974]. Certainly our involvement in that was very strong. I remember I was Ron Ziegler's control officer. He was the spokesperson for the White House.

I remember there was one very funny incident where because of my experience in Japan before as a student, my language, and I was one of these people who did get out. Even though the program developing job was an inside job, I would still get out and meet

people and try to learn as much about what was going on in Japan. I guess this is when my Tokyo contacts really started to expand. I got to know a lot of the people in various fields, not just the policy business politics foreign policy field but also the arts and other social fields. As a result whenever there was a high level event like that, the protocol office would invariably come to me and ask for me to help draw up the guest list for big receptions or big events that needed not just your parliamentarians and your foreign ministry and you know, not those usual suspects, but some other people to add a little bit of color and flavor and interest to this. So one of the persons that I suggested we include, because I had met him a couple of times and he was very sociable, was the actor, Mikone. He came. This was to the Ford reception. The Japanese papers the next day just went bananas. The reason was that Mikone was going through a very messy divorce with his wife at that time, and he brought his girl friend to the embassy reception to meet the President of the United States. We thought this was terrific. We didn't mind any of this at all. It got us more publicity and it was kind of amusing publicity. But the Japanese just went berserk over that one. It was an amusing incident.

Another thing which I used to do which again is more in the fun category than in the serious side, but you know these are the things that make foreign service life interesting. Because of my interest in music and the things we would do with music and arts and all of that. Tokyo saw the first visit of the Metropolitan Opera. The embassy organize it, it was done through local sponsorship. Nevertheless, we arranged to do a big party at the embassy for all the singers of the Met, everybody. There were hundreds of people there. The orchestra, the tech types, the stage hands plus the stars and the kind of sub level stars and all that. I can remember for their performances they came to me and said, "Look we need some extras on-stage because all the performers are going to be Caucasian or black with enough makeup so they look western or look Caucasian. We can't have Japanese extras on-stage. They will stand out; it will look funny." Extras of course, are the people that wear the costumes, the spear carriers, the picadors, the toreadors, that sort of thing. They said can you help round up some extras which I did. For Carmen and for La Boheme we arranged for a number of men, women and children from embassy or the local American Chamber of Commerce. For most of those people that was one of the great plays of their life to as some people said, they made their debut with the Metropolitan Opera in Tokyo

Q: Did you get to carry a spear?

BERRINGTON: Actually I got to dance. Since I was the one who put this all together for them, they gave me the plum role. I was a picador or matador in Carmen, but then in La Boheme in the act II scene, I don't know if you are familiar with it. It is the big café scene on Christmas Eve. Musetta is trying to make her sugar daddy very jealous, so she kind of plays around with people in the audience. At one point she goes and picks a young sailor and dances from one side of the stage to the next and laughs and gives him a drink and then moves on to somebody else. I was the young sailor. So there were some things like that in that time as well. These tended to develop because of the opportunities the job gave me to get out and meet people and make arrangements.

Q: You mentioned the high level visits. Over the years a Japan visit seems obligatory for ranking American officials. As a Japanese hand, what was the impression about this? Did friendships develop or was this just an obligation to get through

BERRINGTON: Oh, yes. I mean, it got to the point where some of them, I'd have to tailor my comments really. We are talking about those Japanese who were more sophisticated, more westernized and usually, I would say nine times out of ten, had enough English language ability where they could really make a connection. Yes, between economic policy makers, Japanese people in the economic policy business whether it was government or the private sector, yes, there were some strong relationships developed. Which for us was terrific. We liked that; that's what we were in the business of doing. We would often, I think I mentioned earlier the international visitor program, send younger members of the Japanese government, private sector, business, academic, media or whatever to the U.S. and they would meet people there. Then when this person over the years as they both kind of grow up in the system, maybe now this person came to Japan as an assistant secretary or you know the vice president of the American Chamber of Commerce or something, they would get together with those people, dinner or maybe even a weekend. If say the person brought his wife with him, they would get together over a weekend and go out to their summer place. Yes, it was very encouraging to see the number of good relationships develop. Now I don't want to overstress this. It is not like there were thousands of these, but there were enough to be encouraged by this.

Q: Well then you left Tokyo in 1975. Whither?

BERRINGTON: Well now it suddenly gets very boring. I went back to the U.S. for three years, 1975 to 1978. Quite frankly I had spent, I had joined in 1967, two years in Thailand, and then four and two, six years in Japan, so I was eight years out. I came back to Washington. I had to come back to Washington. I would like to have stayed out longer, but you couldn't. I didn't have a clue as to what I was supposed to do. I am sure this is typical of many people in out business, I looked around. I saw where some old friends had ended, and I asked them, "Hey are there any openings in your office?" This was, I forget what you called it during those days, it was career development or something. The idea was that you were supposed to do something in Washington that was totally unrelated to what you had done while overseas. I thought well I have been away all this time, eight years. I haven't seen much of the U.S. and I like to travel. I am single, so I thought why don't I join the Board of Examiners because they go around and they administer the Foreign Service oral tests throughout the country. I guess you were there at that time. So that was 1975-1976 that I was there. There were let's see, Betsy Fitzgerald was there. I was there, and there was one other, Jack Jurgens was there. We were the three USIS people. That was terrific. I enjoyed that immensely.

Q: It was a very good time because we were given free flow to ask the questions we wanted to ask. You know we took it very seriously.

BERRINGTON: I can remember our group put together a series of questions that we used repeatedly so there was a standard means by which we could evaluate people, so that we had our kind of stock questions. Now the follow up questions might differ depending on the person's response, but no, there was definitely a series of questions that we had worked on particularly in the USIS category. I was usually assigned to State teams. I remember during those days there was a USIS team with a State person and there was a State team with a USIS person. I was often on the State teams. Because I was in the kind of minority, I almost as you put it could ask whatever I wanted to ask and determine those particular issues.

Yes, we asked everything from name the most outstanding American composer of the 20th century and why they are outstanding, and gave people plenty of latitude to develop this in any way they wanted to. We were not looking for specific answers, such as, when was the Treaty of Paris, not that. It was a great job.

I remember Betsy and I and the others of the various teams, when we traveled it was not necessarily a State team, but when we went out we did San Francisco, we did Seattle, we did Chicago, Boston. I am sure I have forgotten some place else, oh Atlanta, great experiences. It also gave you a much better sense of what it was like out there, what people knew about the foreign service, what they didn't know which was more disturbing, of course.

That was also a time when we were asked to do some recruiting as well. I can remember I always thought this very amusing. They were eager to recruit more African-American kids into the foreign service. Somebody decided that the African-American kids they wanted were more in the southern schools, or at least the HBCUs, the historic black colleges and universities. So they looked around the office and decided let's send somebody from the south down to those southern HBCUs. So who goes? Me! I always felt kind of weird going to these HBCUs trying to recruit blacks. I remember at Clark College in Atlanta, I was introduced as Mr. Berrington from the CIA, which I was able to joke around with. But that was a good job. I have always remembered that as one of the more enjoyable jobs.

Q: What was your impression of both the candidates you received in general and then were there any sectional differences as you traveled around?

BERRINGTON: I don't recall any sectional differences. There was a huge variety in the clientele though. One of the things that really reinforced itself on me is that just because somebody passed the written test by no means qualified them to get into the foreign service. They might be able to do very well on a kind of, the written exam, of course was brought to you by the folks that brought you the old college boards Princeton testing. You now somebody who scored very high, bring them into that oral interview and they might just flounder around.

Q: I mean there really are test takers, in particular multiple choice tests which these were.

BERRINGTON: Yes, exactly. Then you know the reactions that people had to our oral interview. Some people would get very offended at some of the questions.

The challenge was not so much that it was the right or wrong answer but just see how they would react under a challenging situation. Some people literally took it hook, line, and sinker, would get angry, get flustered, and couldn't deal with it. Others would show much more poise and self assurance in dealing with questions or challenges to what they had said. I can remember one experience in Los Angeles where we were actually…the man did not pass. He was a pretty inferior candidate who couldn't deal with much of what we asked him about. But he was very full of himself, and at the end he told us that he was so outraged at the way we treated him that he was going to sue us for discrimination against Jewish people from east Los Angeles. Because first of all, the exam had been held in the western part of the city rather than the eastern part. He had a difficult time getting tot he exam site. This was at the old federal building; we had no choice in it. For whatever reason, he decided we were discriminatory against Jewish people too. I don't know why, but you would encounter that kind of really outrageous reactions or emotional responses to…because in those days you immediately told the interviewees, after the panel consulted, whether they passed or did not pass the oral examination.

Q: During my time on these BEX panels, giving the panels decision was not always the most fun thing to do.

BERRINGTON: But it was interesting. Based on my experience there were three people, one in San Francisco, one in Chicago, and one here in Washington who passed, who eventually came into USIA and wound up in Japan later on with me. I used to call them kind of my club, my group because they and I still keep up even though all three of them are now retired. In fact all three retired before I did. Sort of interesting over the years that we kept up from the day of that oral exam until the ends of their careers.

Q: At that time it was you could get intellectually engaged because you could have these follow up questions. Today I think they work so hard to make sure we are not discriminating against Jewish people from east Los Angeles that the determined by a roll of the dice so no hands can be discerned to touch the interviewee.

BERRINGTON: One of my favorite questions which you may recall as well was, you would invariably get somebody who was a specialist in French literature or German politics in the 19th century, something like that. We would say, "OK you are a junior officer in the embassy and a Congressman shows up at the airport. You go out to meet him, and you have to ride with him from the airport to the embassy in the car, and the Congressman asks you "OK Mr. so and so, tell me what is the state of the German U.S. relationship or the French American relationship today in the 1970s." How would you describe the relationship?'" Most of these people couldn't handle it at all, and some of

them would get very irate at well what's wrong with what I have. I already know so much about France or Germany or Spain. Why are you insisting that I tell you about what is happening today? That is very superficial they would say. You could see how they would just they couldn't deal with the needs of a foreign policy relationship in the 20th century.

Q: When I was on this, "You are in Brazil, and you are throwing a film festival. What films would you select? Then we would wave a hand and all of a sudden, "You are in Moscow, what films would you show?" To see if they could do a little playing around in their mind. The cultural side was great, wonderful, for theses kind of testing.

BERRINGTON: But that was a good job. I think probably you and I were there in sort of the golden years of BEX because of what I hear they are doing today it doesn't sound nearly as...

Q: I think so too. Well this is what I say it has gotten very automatic mainly as a defense against suits to make sure that you are getting everybody equal treatment. They have done as much as they can to remove any initiative on the part of the examiners.

BERRINGTON: And I find that, I would be interested in your memory at this point of this particular issue, but I find it very curious about some of the suits from women that they have not received equal treatment in the foreign service. Particularly at that time in BEX the strong message we received, maybe this is just USIA, I don't know, the strong message we received was to try and get more women. And to bend over backwards to get more women.

Q: Yes, as a father of two daughters, I was all for this. I am somewhat amused that, if you had a woman being examiner, she was always tougher than the men. You know, I made it by God, no special consideration for the next in line. I think the system was probably as fair as you can get. The courts, however, thought differently.

BERRINGTON: So that was my first year, mid-1976 to mid-1977, back in Washington. Again the idea, as I said, was to not just to do something that was different from what you had done overseas, but then also to do as many different things as you could find, so BEX for one year. The second year I went to the press office of USIA because an old friend from Thailand, Bob Beecham was running that.

It was called IPS. Information and Press Service. This was the main press the Information Press Office headquarters back in Washington that we support the work of the information divisions overseas. Bob had been the press attaché in Bangkok when I was up country in Thailand, so I just went to him and said, "Look, is there anything I can do in your office?" He literally carved out a special assistant position which I filled for a year. It was pretty boring work. It wasn't much to do. In a sense I was kind of his liaison, sat in on meetings all over USIA, meetings in which he wanted a representative there so that I could report back to him what they were planning, what they were talking about. You know, I wrote a lot of basic weekly reports. It was sort of the kind of scud [colloquialism

for “scullery”] work that you assign to a junior officer or a new member of your staff. So I did that for a year. The useful part of that job was that it gave me insights into how a part of USIA works that otherwise I wouldn't know anything about.

Q: And the press side is a major branch of USIA.

BERRINGTON: Oh of course. And my work in Fukuoka and in Tokyo, you know, Center work and the program job, while they might be seen as probably as slightly more cultural, in fact there was a lot of press work, press activity, press coordination for the things I was doing there. So I wasn't totally doing press work in general. Then finally after those two years, I guess I started to think about well I am going to be going back overseas in another year or so, so how do I find out where I want to go? So, I looked around, and there was another friend heading up the inspections office. I thought well why don't I become an inspector. That would give me an opportunity to visit some posts and find out what things are like because my experience so far was just in Thailand and in Japan, USIS Asia.

So I became an inspector. I was the junior most inspector in the office. I was they youngest, most recent. Everyone else was a senior officer, many years in the agency. Again the only reason I got in there was because the chief inspector was an old friend, somebody I had known. His name was Dan Alexi. Dan Alexi was the guy who, if you recall, visited me when I was in Thailand and said they were thinking of revving down the Thai operation and I see Japan in your background. Would you like to go to Japan? When I saw Dan running the inspections office I thought that was a good way to get in there. So kind of like BEX, that was one of those unusual jobs that people don't seek out. They are not that favorite phrase of the personnel staff, they are not career enhancing. But I was never really into big career enhancing anyway. I was always sort of looking for things that would be fun or more enjoyable. So I thought, well I will do that for a year. Then as the youngest, junior-most member of the team, I tended to get more African assignments than anybody, so I visited a number of African posts. Or when I was lucky to get one inspection to Italy, I was the one that went around to all the constituent posts. The inspectors would try to make sure there was at least one constant member for every place to give a kind of unity and level playing field to everybody. So I went to all the operations in Italy as well, which was great.

The nice thing about being an inspector apart from the opportunities to travel and see what was going on all over the world was it also gave you a chance to meet a lot of people, to broaden your contacts, to you know, put places and bodies with the names that you have heard about or read in the local USIA bulletins or whatever. Those three years, particularly the IPS job and the inspection job really made a big difference in giving me the opportunity to, I mean USIA was not a great big agency to begin with, but it gave me more opportunity to meet a lot of people and kind of extend my network within the bureaucracy.

Q: What was your impression of USIA operations in Africa? This was the Carter administration. How did you find what we were doing there, your impression?

BERRINGTON: Well I am afraid I was rather inflexible in looking at a lot of these operations because I had come from Japan. Japan to me, what we were doing there was still the benchmark. The way things were done, the variety of things we did, the kind of coordinated effort, embassy wide as well as USIS mission wide, and I would go out to all these other places whether in Latin America or Africa or Europe or whatever. I would often see nothing equal to that. I would get pretty frustrated. Since the word about the Japan program was circulating, people were, I mean it wasn't a secret. I mean it was a point of discussion. It was seen as sort of the future of the agency, and why there was such reluctance to pick up on that or seemed to be a kind of bureaucratic lethargy in instituting anything like that. I was probably rather difficult with some of my USIS peers, very critical. Now that is not to say they were doing bad things. I am probably being more critical of myself for not acknowledging the good work they were doing. But I think I allowed my enthusiasm for the true way which we were doing in Japan to kind of interfere with my understanding of the good work they were doing there. I was probably not the easiest inspector to deal with because of that. There were some very good people there, but one of the things you had to keep in mind was they didn't have nearly the funds. They didn't have the budgets we had in a place like Japan, so they couldn't possibly do as much. They didn't have the size staff. One of the things that quickly impresses itself upon you if you spend a lot of time in a big important operation like Tokyo, I suspect Germany would be the same way and probably a few other countries of that level, what we used to call the rag one. Not all but many of them were probably like this. They would attract a better quality of officer. They would get people who were more policy oriented or more dynamic or just had maybe risen in the system faster, and saw those countries as important places where there career could...

Q: Also, most of the developed countries you mentioned had multiple constituent posts, which were good training grounds for young officers.

BERRINGTON: Africa didn't have that. Quite frankly one of the reasons why I volunteered for African inspections and enjoyed going to Africa was because I never in the world wanted to be assigned there, but I thoroughly enjoyed visiting these places as an inspector. In some respects I thought, “Oh my God, there but for the grace of God go I.” I would have hated to be in, You know in those days Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso or Chad or Somalia. There is a map of Africa in this interview room; I am trying to think of all the places I was in. Nigeria. One of the nice places was Senegal; that was fine. But Malawi, for example, a beautiful country but there is nothing…as Gertrude Stein said, "There is no there, there." Can you imagine spending two or three years of your life there? As a result I think some of the officers that wound up there kind of like the Dr. Livingstones of the 19th century probably enjoyed sinking into anonymity and disappearing into the African bush, fully confident that they would never be bothered by anybody except for that occasional person from Washington or inspector that might come through during the three or four years, but maybe never at all. They could literally be the

chief of that diplomatic posting. As a young officer, they would be one of the senior American officers at post. The missions were not large. The ambassador wasn't usually a terribly senior person in the foreign service himself. There would be the only three or four people or five or six in the post anyway. It attracted a certain kind of a person.

These were not necessarily, now I hate to tar and feather everybody like this and I don't mean to, but I think for a lot of these places, it didn't attract the kind of people who were necessarily innovative or imaginative or kind of looking to break new ground in how things were done. They were very comfortable with the way things were and did what they did very nicely and very well, thank you, but not much more than that. I was rather impatient with this and not as understanding as I should have been. But you know, I guess one of the things I would have to say as an inspector, I was extremely impressed with what people put up with. I mean the living conditions; the health or educational opportunities or lack of cultural events or anything like that. I mean how they could spend two or three years like that, I think few Americans really appreciate or understand what really it takes to serve in some of those places. It is not that much different today. It may even be worse.

Now you have got the AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) problems and more civil unrest. In many respects some of these places are not as attractive now as they were back then. Some of the places were extremely attractive. I though Mali was an attractive place. I thought Senegal was an attractive place. Uganda, well the country was beautiful. But by and large most of them would have been very difficult assignments.

Q: Well, in 1978, you had a rather unusual move didn't you?

BERRINGTON: Yes, I was in the inspection tour of Italy. I will never forget this; I was in Milano, and I had a very bad cold, and I had stayed in bed that day rather than do whatever the team was doing. The phone rang, and it was a friend of mine, in fact a person who I had known from Peace Corps days. He was in Thailand the same time I was. In fact, he and another woman and I all happened to wind up at Harvard University during our postgraduate work together. He was in education, she was in Chinese, and I was in Japanese. The two of them started flirting, and in the meantime, he joined USIA through the regular system, and I went off on this special thing to Thailand. While I was in Thailand, he was assigned to Laos and they got married. She came out, they had a big wedding ceremony in Laos. I was best man at their wedding. So ever since Peace Corps days we have kept up this relationship, you know, graduate school, USIS, marriage, so forth and so on. Well, he eventually returned to Washington and became a personnel officer in USIA.

So, the ambassador in Ireland, William Shannon [July 1977 to June 1981], had had a very hard time with the people USIA wanted to send to him as PAO. He had been a columnist for the New York Times. He was a political appointee by Carter. On paper he looked like an absolutely ideal candidate. He had written books on Ireland, was very knowledgeable about Ireland, very learned, well educated man, a lot of friends in Ireland, a perfect

assignment. Well, he wanted a family friend assigned as PAO. He didn't want just a routine foreign service officer, so every time USIA nominated somebody for him to review, he would turn it down. This went through 11 candidates believe it or not. He kept saying what about this friend of mine who it turns out was a person at NASA or something, who he thought would be best for public affairs. USIA, John Reinhart was the director at that point, and the story I heard was, Reinhart didn't tell me this directly, but I heard this through my friends that Reinhart literally said, "Look. We have been sending you terrific candidates. This next one has all the qualifications you're asking for. He is good in cultural; good in political, good in, you know, he is a planner, blah, blah, blah. He has no background in Ireland but he is well versed in other parts of the world." That was me.

Q: Unbeknownst to you.

BERRINGTON: Well, yes, unbeknownst to me. Reinhart said, "This is the best we can do. And he is young." One of the other things most of the others had been older candidates, and he kept saying he wanted somebody younger. As we will eventually find out he wanted these special traits, no Ireland young and all of that because he wanted to bully and control whoever this person was going to be. But anyway, so Reinhart told him, "If you don't approve this guy, we are not sending anybody. We are just going to shut the operation down and USIS won't have anybody, because in so many words you have unreasonably turned down every candidate we have sent you so this is the last one." So he said, "OK." At that point they called me up and said, "Would you be willing to go to Ireland?" I said, "Tell me about it." This is my friend who called. I was sick in bed in Italy, and I didn't, "Ireland?" I was expecting to be assigned to some African place or Latin America or whatever. I thought about it for about a half an hour and called him back and said, "Yes, why not?" I won't need any language. It should be fun. They said, "The ambassador is a difficult person. You are going to have a hard time with him." But you know, I was young and full of myself so I said, "Sure. I can manage." So I went off to Ireland in the summer of 1978.

Q: Today is 2 June 2000. Robin, it sounds like this is going to be an Irish saga. Okay, you were in Ireland from when to when?

BERRINGTON: I was there from 'the summer of 1978, don't ask me exactly when, July or August, until very early 1981.

Q: And who was this difficult ambassador?

BERRINGTON: The ambassador was a political appointee by the name of William Shannon who had been a columnist for the New York Times. He had written a number of books on Ireland. He was certainly knowledgeable about Ireland, and of course compared to most political appointees in Dublin, he knew something about the country, the politics, the social, the religious, economic history and of all the difficulties there. Most Irish American and every ambassador to Ireland has been Irish American. Most Irish

Americans that were appointed to go there, of course, their sole claim to fame was the fact that they were Irish Americans and that they were probably contributed to a campaign or were somehow involved in the party.

Q: What had Shannon done politically wise?

BERRINGTON: Oh, he had supported Carter of course. He had come out in favor of Jimmy Carter. Carter was kind of pulling a leaf out of the page of Jack Kennedy in that he was trying to appoint, just as Kennedy had appointed say Ed Reischauer to Japan, I think Carter was trying to appoint equally knowledgeable people that were going to their post assignments. I'm sure that is why he picked Bill Shannon. Shannon's political instincts were pretty much pro-Carter anyway, so it was a natural fit. On paper I am sure everybody thought it was the ideal assignment. As we found out later that was not the case.

Q: OK when you get there, in the first place what was sort of the situation Ireland-America wise or just in Ireland? I am sure that if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland is part of your beat in a way.

BERRINGTON: No it is not.

Q: Maybe not technically but what happens there has to effect on what you do.

BERRINGTON: OK well first of all just to clear that up. Northern Ireland is part of the UK and of course the embassy in Dublin has no diplomatic accreditation to Northern Ireland. That could lead to the occasional problem. But in terms of the issue, the problem was of course, Northern Ireland, so almost everything that happened in the south in the so-called republic. Everything that happened in the republic was impacted by various Northern Ireland issues. Whenever we would talk with the Irish government, invariably there was a northern element to positions.

Q: Well what was happening in Northern Ireland in 1978 when you arrived?

BERRINGTON: Well, things were no better or worse than they had been in previous years, meaning the IRA was still in full bloom. The IRA was still very much in the business of terrorism and intimidation. Of course the Protestant extremists were equally in the business. It was very much a tit for tat. In the three years I was there, you know, there were constant shootings, assassinations, knee-cappings. It was always very Byzantine who did it. You know, did the IRA do it to implicate the Protestants. Did the Protestants do it to implicate the IRA and make it look like the IRA had done it? Did in fact the IRA shoot their own? Did the Protestants shoot their own? Were they just shooting the other side? I mean it was more convoluted than a basket of fishes. You could never tell what was really the story. Then in addition to that of course, occasionally the IRA would send their parties of organizers south to recruit, or in more extremist tactics, to rob banks to pay for their activities up north. Even though the south had no terrorism,

there was no threat to any of us, Irish or American in the south, unless those things like forays south to rob banks or whatever would in effect contribute to a tense atmosphere regardless. There were of course, this was at the time when the British were cracking down even further on the IRA. So the things like those movements in the H Block, the prison. The called it that because it was in the shape of an "H". The H Block where so many of the IRA prisoners were incarcerated, they would do hunger strikes. Some of them would do such things as take their own feces and spread it over the walls of their cells. It was just a time when feelings and tensions were constantly high and it took very little of any kind of spark to set off something which usually happens about once a month or once every other month. A spark meaning something a bit bigger than your typical knee capping or shooting some guy in a bar.

Q: The violence in Northern Ireland probably dominates most people thinking, but for the Embassy in Dublin, what was the political scene in the Republic of Ireland?

BERRINGTON: Well of course, Ireland was one of the few west European countries that was not part of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). So, anything that had a security element to it, we were always eager to get the Irish on our side even though they were neutral. So if you had things like the cruise missile question brewing, we always wanted to brief the Irish government and make sure that the Irish media and other opinion leaders at least knew about the issue so that even if they didn't agree with us, they could argue it intelligently, not from the basis of fiction or rumor. There was also at the same time, late 1970s early 1980s, this was as you may recall, things in Central America were heating up, and there were many Irish missionaries, Catholic missionaries, in Central America, who tended to be extremely sympathetic to the peasant elements or the rebellious elements in El Salvador or Nicaragua or whatever. So there was a constant issue there with the Irish government. Probably I would say when you talked to most of these guys, they would understand what our problem was in the American backyard, but that because of the extreme vocal opposition of the Church and the Catholic missionaries who would come back to Ireland after two or three years and loudly talk about how they saw the United States as siding with the right wing or the establishment or the forces of oppression or whatever, they would usually cause problems for us in the public affairs area over our policy in Central America.

There were the basic trade issues. Ireland was if not a member of NATO, it was a member of EU (European Union), and whenever there were any trade issues, we would get involved with that as well. Those were on the international side.

On the domestic side, probably our biggest constant issue was the problem with immigration and just how many Irish could go to the U.S. and under what terms and the whole business of getting a green card and working in the United States and those kinds of consular issues that you would understand very well. They were constantly in the forefront. These were not major concerns, but the newspapers would always blow these things way up out of proportion. Irish students stopped at Kennedy Airport, strip searched

blah blah, that sort of thing, headlines in the papers. So we constantly had to put out small brush fires like that as well.

Having said all that of course, the Irish American government to government relationship was extremely cordial, extremely friendly. The foreign ministry was open to me. In fact it was easier for me to get into the foreign ministry that it is to get into the State Department - even then. It was not unusual at all for Irish government officials to call us in and tell us exactly what they were going to say and why they were going to say it and try to keep us from being blindsided on whatever governmental pronouncement would be coming up. It was as close a relationship, I think, as you could have.

Q: Were we using, I mean was Dublin thought to be a good post to monitor what was going on in the European Union, or then it was the European community?

BERRINGTON: Not really. The only times we could really take advantage of the Irish position in the EU was those once every how many years, seven years or whatever at that time, when they were the president of the union. As you know the presidency of EU rotates among each of the member states, something like once every six months

But when they would be the president we should have access to their thoughts, their ideas and information about how other EU states thought and ideas as well. Outside of that our recourses geographically so far from Brussels that it wasn't exactly the best place to monitor what was going on in the EU itself. Our efforts to lobby the Irish like the Americans would just lobby another member state of the EU, a member state that was different in that not a member of NATO and very much prided itself on its neutrality.

Q: How about the Irish media from your point of view as far as wanting to give a good picture?

BERRINGTON: Well the Irish media were like the media every place I suppose. They were extraordinarily frustrating group to work with. Like most of the Irish on a person to person basis, they were very friendly, very cordial. I spent many an evening, since I was the PAO, a one person operation, I was in effect the press officer, the cultural officer, you name it, everything. Since I regarded my press work as far more important than cultural work, I tended to spend much more time with the media than with the cultural side of the business. So I spent a lot of evenings out drinking with various friends in the media. These were all people with whom as I say, I had a very good personal relationship with, but that did not always translate into a tangible result the next day in the newspaper. The papers were very, how should I put it, they did not necessarily follow the same standards of journalistic ethics as we would like to think the best American papers do here. The idea of having a story coming from one source and then waiting for a second or third verification before printing it which is pretty much standard practice in the U.S. The Irish just don't care about that sort of thing. If just one person comes in and says the sky is falling, that is a banner headline the next day, the sky is falling. There was one paper, probably the most prestigious paper called the Irish Times, which was probably the paper

that made the most of a strident effort to show that it was not pro American. Not that it was anti American, but just that it was not necessarily pro American. It tended to reflect this in its editorial stance and in so many other reports that they would bring out. The other papers were largely tabloids. There is a very strong tabloid nature to the Irish press.

One that has stuck in my mind for years which could have been in a tabloid anyplace in the world was a story about a very tragic airplane crash in San Diego. On the front page of the paper was this huge picture of the plane going down in flames going out of the tail and all of that. Huge banner headline says, "Irishmen Killed in Air Horror." Two Irishmen or one Irishman, killed in air horror. The very small sub headline underneath said 130 others also died. The whole point of it was that one or two Irishmen had died. To them, you know, and they would always put the most lurid details. Then again, usually on the second page of the paper, there would be naked girls.

Q: I was going to ask about the Church in those days. Things have changed considerably, but what was the role of the church?

BERRINGTON: Well the Church and the media of course, were two totally different things. The Irish have always had a very kind of schizophrenic attitude about the Church, and it depends on which Irish you talk to. In a big city like Dublin, largely the Church was kind of a peripheral element. For most of the intelligentsia, for many in the government, for most of the media, the artistic community, the business leaders, few of them really let Church policy shape their own thinking or their own view or behavior. But once you got out into the villages and the small towns, then the priests or the local bishop could have an extraordinary influence. As a result you had this incredible conservatism about the Church still really having a strong effect on the way your average Irishman felt back then. Now this isn't to say that the government or intelligentsia or others made a point of thumbing their nose at the Church. Oh of course not. They would all go through the kind of motion of saying they follow the Church's teaching. But on the personal level, in fact most of them had nothing but disdain for the Church's teachings about birth control or divorce or homosexuality or whatever. All of which at that time in Ireland were outlawed. Censorship largely based on the conservative attitudes of what they used to call the hierarchy, the Church hierarchy. Censorship was terrible. I can remember that of example, there was a Monty Python movie called the Life of Brian, a satirical film about Christ. It was never allowed to be shown in Ireland. Kramer vs. Kramer, a film about divorce, that movie was never allowed to be shown in Ireland. People had to go to London to see movies like that, which of course, made it a joke. Irish got across all the time. Girls, young girls wanted to have an abortion, they would have to go to London to have an abortion.

Q: Did this impact on your work say on the cultural side or anything else? Were there issues that came up, American type issues that came up that conflicted with the Church or was this something that...

BERRINGTON: Not really. Not on the cultural side because as I say, most of the people I was dealing with again it was largely a target audience group that I was dealing with, a small very identifiable number of men and women in the political, media, academic, artistic, etc. communities.

If you were thinking nationwide, and if your total target audience nationwide was 100%, then I would estimate that probably 75 or 80% of our target audience were right in Dublin alone. The other 20% or whatever were in Cork, Galway, and one or two other small communities. For example, one that was not in Dublin, it was about 30-40 miles east of town, so in effect in the countryside, was a place called Maynooth. Speaking of the church, St. Patrick's College at Maynooth was the training center for priests. Maynooth also happened to have one of the best American studies centers in Ireland. So I was often going off to Maynooth to talk to the priests/professors and to the students. I had extremely good relationship with all of them out there. Some of my most pleasant evenings were sitting around the fires on a cold Irish winter evening talking about various issues with these scholar priests. It must have been what it was like back in the middle ages. But never did we start talking about abortion, because those were not issues between Ireland and America. If they ever did come up, of course I would speak my personal mind, and they respected it.

Q: While I guess your successor really had it in spades as far as Central America was concerned. Under the Carter administration Central American issues were not...

BERRINGTON: Well remember that Bob Weisberg was in Nicaragua, and he was having a hard time even then, so it wasn't just clear sailing under the Carter administration. Certainly the Irish attitudes in opposition to American policy were building up full steam. I can remember it was not unusual to have groups of people demonstrating out in front of the embassy holding their placards, "Americans out of El Salvador" or "American sympathy for X regime is immoral." It was not unusual for a number of those demonstrators to be nuns and priests wearing their habits and their uniforms. Then very often, and here is where it used to get to be fun, because they often wanted to present a petition to the President, they would come in. One representative would be allowed inside the building, usually a priest or a nun, and of course who would be the person that would meet with them? Me! Do you think the ambassador would do this? NO way! Once this person got into my office, it would usually be a half hour harangue. I would just sit there and let them run on and on. When they got it all out of them, I would say, "Thank you very much. I will give this to the President," show them out the door, let them leave, and of course the petition or the letter got no further than my desk. I am sure that is not news to anybody. But no, so these issues didn't affect the cultural side of our business as much as they did the press side and the foreign policy side.

Q: Before we get to the ambassador, I am saving that for last, what about, but I would like to turn to the Irish American connection in terms of support for the IRA. The bars of south Boston with the contributing…

BERRINGTON: Correction, not bars, pubs. Of course that was a constant problem. Because for most Americans, and you really should say Irish-Americans, because very few other hyphenated Americans contributed to NORAID, the Irish Northern Aid Committee. For most Irish-Americans, the "Troubles" up north were a British problem. They never saw it as being an Irish problem. When I say a British problem I mean it was the British fault, the British trouble that was forcing the issue. Most Americans had a very naive idea at best and ignorant, uninformed at worst, attitudes about the IRA or any of the so-called nationalist parties that favored expelling the British and restoring Northern Ireland to the republic. For example, the IRA, which a lot of Americans still don't realize, its antecedents are basically very Marxist, socialist approach to government, democracy, human rights. If most Americans had known that, of course, they would have been horrified because most of the Irish-Americans that supported these causes were among the more conservative Americans here in the United States. They had no idea the IRA and its allies were quite left of center and quite proud of being left of center. They didn't dispute that identification. Needless to say they didn't talk about this when they were in the U.S. They meaning IRA or their surrogates when they were in the U.S. NORAID and the others that raised funds in favor of these groups just of course, played all the stereotypes and all of the anti British tunes as loudly as they could and didn't try to make anybody more aware of what was really going on up there. As far as most Americans that attended these fund-raising dinners or contributed to the pubs in south Boston or whatever, the whole thing was the British oppressors and you know, the poor and suffering Irish. You would have never thought that the Irish had assassinated or shot anybody on their own. It was the British that were causing the problem. So the Americans who contributed to most of these causes didn't really have a clue of what was going on, and despite the efforts to inform them, they did not accept this. Of course we had a great close relationship, we the U.S. government had a very close relationship with the Irish government; we had an even closer relationship to the British government. So as far as the U.S. government image to most Irish-Americans, we were seen as part of the problem because of our close alliance with the British. So, anything on our part to try and inform or open up the issue so there was a better understanding was seen as suspect or propaganda or pro British fiction. So we were constantly dealing with this problem, the whole image of the Irish.

Q: I suppose with the visiting Irish Congressman and Congresswoman you would go into what you just said, explaining some of what the IRA was and all. I imagine you didn't get very far.

BERRINGTON: Exactly. Of course the smart members of congress whether Irish-American or not, knew perfectly well what was going on, but for various political reasons might not have expressed this vocally in public forum, in order to retain the support of their Irish-American constituencies. They might very well sit on the fence and not really come out and criticize NORAID or the other pro IRA groups. Others were braver and more courageous and did speak up and say wait a minute, let's really talk about what is going on here. Of course, then you had the Irish-American businessman or you know, Joe and Jane Doe on the street who would visit their homeland. They, of course were

probably among the most ill informed and naive about what was going on. They were constantly eager to go into the embassy and talk to us and tell us so that they knew what was really going on. Yes, one of the problems I think in an assignment like Dublin, and I hear it is not that much different in Italy or Israel or other countries where there are large second or third generation immigrant communities is dealing with the Americans who come back to the homeland and want to have some impact there. Particularly Ireland, the Americans tended to see Ireland in a, I don't know if you remember the old John Ford movie The Quiet Man. That is very much a fictional portrayal, romantic kind of green idea of what Ireland is. Most Americans tended to buy that line hook, line, and sinker.

Q: Well they say every American has an Irish grandmother. Were there any issues where we as the government would like to take one stand and we find that for Irish reasons we couldn't do that? I wonder if relations with Ireland are as influenced by domestic politics as people describe relations with Israel; the friends of Israel are influential and very supportive of Israel. Did we have that type of relationship with Ireland?

BERRINGTON: No not really, and of course I think we probably saw the Middle Eastern problem on a much larger magnitude, an issue that in fact could at the time, and still even today I suppose although not as much so, could put the question of international peace in some doubt. You know, that was when the Russians were very much the Syrian's protectors and all of that. The Northern Ireland thing never really achieved that kind of international status as far as attracting the Soviets or other competing world powers. It was basically an English versus the Irish issue, and as far as we were concerned the only times that it had an effect on our dealings outside of the Irish per-se was occasionally it would be an irritant or a you know burr in the saddle of some issue with the British. But no, none of the other issues like a trade issue with the EU or a cruise missile issue or something like that. The Northern Ireland issue never really got into that and affected how that was seen.

Q: Well now on your issues, the public affairs level, were you in touch with our embassy in London? Sometimes the embassy in London and Dublin, because of the ambassador's personalities, might have coordination problems, but I was wondering at your level.

BERRINGTON: Yes. I was, of course, I am sure the ambassador and the DCM (Deputy chief of Mission) and the political counselor were in touch with London a lot too. But for many of my issues, for me and my activities as well as issues, for example American studies I referred to, the Irish Association of American Studies is an island-wide association. It includes Northern Ireland. So, I would go up to Belfast every now and then if there was something happening there. I would always get in touch with my friends, with my colleagues in the American embassy in London to let them know I was doing that. I would also get in touch with the American consulate in Belfast to let them know I was coming up as well. So there was that kind of communication. The post in Dublin was a very small one. It is not a large embassy, and because it was basically me and two local employees, later on in my stay it became three, but that was cut back eventually so it was usually two, because it was just mew and two Irish employees, very often I had to call up

London for consultation or advice about how do deal with X or Y maybe on the administrative side of the business or if such and such a speaker was coming through the area and was stopping off in Dublin as well as London, I would have to get in touch with London to find out how the speaker was handling himself and that sort of thing. So I was on the phone to London fairly often. Usually with my USIS counterparts, not with State people.

Q: Well speaking of speakers and things, women's rights was a hot topic in the U.S. How was the American version of women's rights translating for the Irish? How were they responding to speakers on this topic?

BERRINGTON: I will probably say this a number of times before we are finished on Ireland. It depended on who you talked to. If you were talking to the Dublin intelligentsia, the Dublin media, the Dublin academic community, the business people, if they were on the more progressive forward looking group, they thought women's rights and all of that was terrific. There were a number of women who were active in politics and there were two major parties and sort of one minor party. There were others as well, but two majors and one minor. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were the two major parties and then Labour. The division of parliamentary representation was sort of like half and half and a third. But the women senior political types in Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael or Labour were all very supportive of the whole issue of women's rights and wanted to see more of it come to Ireland and all. Now of course if I had gone out and talked to the hierarchy and the people in the church or the village types, they must have thought this was horrible. This was the worst thing they could imagine.

Q: What was, I was thinking of the Carter administration came in touting human rights and other things that would go with that. Were there anything in particular to that administration of its outlook didn't translate terribly well in Ireland?

BERRINGTON: Oh goodness, there probably were. I just can't think of them anymore. The whole business of human rights of course, was very caught up in what was going on in Central America and all of that. There were always, these are kind of small carbuncles on the body of the relationship, always issues like so and so is going to be executed in a penitentiary in Pennsylvania or Texas or some place, and the Church would always get up in arms about that. There would be demonstrators out in front of the embassy about that.

Q: How would you deal with that?

BERRINGTON: Usually we would just let them do their thing and accepted the letter or petition as I alluded to earlier. There really wasn't much point in making a press release about it. We had information to give out if people wanted, if they didn't understand that the federal government has nothing to do with capital punishment in each of the states, we would have an information sheet to give out to people if they were interested enough. We didn't go out and just start handing these out because people would just tend to toss them aside because the cameras were there. But most of the people we felt really, that

counted in the media or the government or business academic community, this was not a major problem for them. There are lots of things that happen in the relationship between two countries. You know, you have got your special interest groups demonstrating about whatever you can think of. That doesn't mean the embassy has to get out there and make a statement about it or make any kind of a positive countermeasure in response to that. If you did, you would be constantly worrying about all these peripheral or special interest issues rather than the really big things that count.

Q: Well on the cultural side, you mentioned a movie that couldn't be shown. Did you get involved in books, magazines, movies, TV programs, any of this sort of thing?

BERRINGTON: No. There is the American Motion Picture Association headed up by Jack Valenti that would deal with the motion picture problems. If they wanted the embassy to make some sort of a demarche or whatever to whatever the ministry was that was dealing with this, sure. We would go and say, you know, we are sorry to hear that this has been not allowed in the country. American policy stands for freedom of expression blah blah. You know the usual boilerplate. But no, if there was that sort of a problem, we wouldn't get involved with it. The cultural program that we did do was geared to address the problem of the Irish view of America. Do you remember that old New Yorker Magazine cover that characterized the New York resident's view of the United States? Manhattan and the famous buildings are in the foreground and off in the distance is the Hudson River. Between the Hudson and the Pacific Ocean, there are only one or two things.

Now for most Irish, America was very much like that. There was the Irish-American community, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and that loomed extremely large in how they saw America. After that, yes, there were pockets in Chicago, San Francisco, you know, one or two other places, but to Irishmen America was the east coast, and largely the Irish-American communities within that east coast. So I saw my task as showing to those Irish that we thought were important to understand this that there was much more to America than just the Irish communities and only the east coast. I would frequently try to bring in the speakers that could talk about things happening in other parts of the U.S. Or if they were talking about an issue that maybe had a social context to it, show that it wasn't just the Irish-American Congress, the Tip O'Neills or the Governor Careys of New York, Ted Kennedy who were the four horseman for leading Irish Americans in the Senate and Congress. The point was these were not the only people that counted. There were others in America that were making decisions and affecting how American policy or domestic events progressed, and the Irish should know about this. Usually these were received very well. I think the Irish were hungry to know more about America. Many of the shrewder ones knew that their points of view were distorted largely by the Irish-American filter, and that they welcomed things like this.

There was also an Irish tendency to see American theater or music or dance or whatever through the prism of again Irish-American theater or music, so I would try to bring performers or writers or other creative intellectuals that would show some other aspect of

America. I remember one time we brought in a person, and Indian American poet from the west. They never even thought there were native American poets, and took him around to the universities and gave him an opportunity to do his thing with students and faculty there. I mean that was an eye opener. So we were doing that sort of thing on the cultural side.

Q: You mentioned Tip O'Neill, Patrick Moynihan, Ted Kennedy and George Carey, the Irish-American politicians. Did you find yourself becoming an adjunct to their campaigns back home? I mean they would come over and you would make sure they would get the proper pictures taken there, the Blarney Stone or whatever?

BERRINGTON: No, not really. Irish-Americans were constantly passing through. I can remember one time Tip O'Neill headed up a CODEL (Congressional Delegation) that came to town. There was an Italian-American from Boston, Conti. There must have been about ten or twelve, most of them Irish-American, a few of them were not Irish-American. I think they probably thought it would be a kick to with Tip to Ireland. They would come to the embassy for an hour or two for a briefing. Invariably there would be a lunch that the ambassador would host. But most of the time these guys were out playing golf, meeting their own contacts, doing their own thing with very little input or guidance from the embassy. Ireland and England are very similar in that because everybody speaks English, because the Americans sort of assume they are just like us, it is very easy for the Tip O'Neills or anybody else in Washington to just pick up the phone, or have their staff person pick up the phone, and call directly to so and so. You know they say I want to get in touch with the Taoiseach, the Prime Minister. They could just phone right on through, and, given the stature and position of these people in Washington, for the PM to get a call from somebody like Tip O'Neill, of course he would take it. So if these people wanted to have their appointments set up with members of the Irish Dáil which is the parliament, they would just do it directly. They didn't necessarily work through us. It was, of course, a source of constant frustration for us, because we wanted to keep tabs on what our people were doing. We wanted to at least, if not to shape or tell them what they could and could not do or say, we wanted to at least be present so we could find out what was going on and pick up the information and learn more about it. Some congressmen or some officials would be very good about this and would welcome our presence. Others whether to opposition or just indifference would not include us. So we were not necessarily reduced to just kind of advance men or kind of camping issues for these people. Of course, what they did in Ireland did have a political aspect to it, but it wasn't through us. They could have done it on their own. And when many of these people came to Ireland it wasn't always policy issues they were interested in.

Q: I can understand, congressmen wanting to see the Israeli Prime Minister, but is there really an interest in calling on the Irish Government?

BERRINGTON: I am not quite sure I would agree with you there. There probably is value with having their picture taken with Jack Lynch or who ever the prime minister is at the time. Most of my time it was Jack Lynch. Jack Lynch [Fianna Fáil Party; July 5, 1977

to December 11, 1979] and Charlie Haughey [Fianna Fáil Party; December 11, 1979 to June 30, 1981] were the two prime ministers while I was there. Yes, they wanted that, but the Jack Lynches and Charley Haugheys probably were not as well known in the United States as Israel's Golda Meier would have been. But there was a lot more golf and shopping and sight seeing. That was a much larger part of any Irish itinerary. I don't think they really took as much pains to conceal that as in other countries because I think most of the Irish-Americans understood why they were going there. If they were going there, they would want to play golf too and go shopping. So it wasn't seen as much of a negative of the trip as maybe in other places.

Q: Well, let's talk about the embassy, internal relations and all of that.

BERRINGTON: Well as I said before, the embassy was a very small place. I was the only American in USIS. There was one ambassador, one deputy chief of mission, one person in the political section, one person GSO, one agricultural attaché, one econ person. The consular section was the biggest section in the whole embassy. The consular had two or three people in it. One defense attaché. Gosh who am I leaving out, oh, one labor officer. And the Marine Corps detachment. There were four or five of them as usual. That was pretty much about it. Considering how much Ireland loomed in the American consciousness, not a terribly huge embassy largely because the issues are not that great other than the northern issue. A lot of the northern issue, there wasn't much we could do in terms of embassy officers. So, it was a very small, very close embassy, and relationships were very good within the embassy. I had easy access to the DAO. the defense attaché, or my colleagues in econ. The ambassador would have meetings two or three times a week, and it was practically for everybody. It wasn't like the country team and then the others. I mean that was pretty much it. The building was a very round kind of doughnut shaped building with a hole in the middle. Have you ever seen it?

My office was on the first floor very close to the main entrance. I had two local employees. There was a huge number of local employees. The consular section again had the largest number of local employees. The economic, defense, agriculture, and administrative offices had their local employees as well. The ambassador had a driver. I mean it was the usual complement for a small embassy like that.

Q: How did the ambassador operate?

BERRINGTON: Well, Shannon was a very enigmatic man. I mean I knew this was not going to be an easy job because of his difficulty in finally settling on a USIS person. In my briefings going out from both USIA and State, everybody told me he is a very smart, a very shrewd, a very knowledgeable guy, but that he is a total neophyte in the diplomatic business, and also he tends to be rather opinionated. I didn't quite realize though how private he was. He was not a man to communicate very easily his ideas and thoughts. You really had to draw it out of him. He was not a very gregarious or outgoing person. I guess you would almost describe him as an egg head intellectual. I am purposely choosing a derogatory term, in his social skills and style because he was soft spoken, few words, and

sometimes uncomfortable in the social settings. But this is not to say he was incapable of going out and doing things, no not at all. He was constantly going out, giving speeches, which he was very good at. He would usually write his own speeches with very little help from the rest of us. He assumed that he knew more about the issues than anybody else. He was an extremely self confident person, so he didn't always, like many ambassadors would, he did not necessarily rely on his staff for information or advice. Rather, he tended to be the one who gave us the information or advice and very little of a two way street. But he was good at going out and giving speeches. He was good at attending events. Even though he was fairly introverted and shy, he realized this was part of the job, and I think he enjoyed it, and he was I must say, pretty good at it. To some the Dublin community consisted of the president of Ireland, the prime minister, the archbishop in charge of the hierarchy, and the American ambassador. That's right there in the top people in the country. So, the American ambassador was constantly getting invitations. Bill Shannon's problem, of course, was deciding which events to go to.

We in the embassy had very clear ideas of what were the things he should be doing, and even though we would let him know, he didn't always, maybe I should say seldom, followed our advice. He had his own ideas about what needed to be done. And in some cases he was right, and in some cases he was wrong. But he was not a person who took you in and who developed a cordial working relationship. He would always keep you at a distance. You were never sure what your standing was with him. As a result he became a very, he was cool to the point of coldness, and you just, he was not the kind of person that developed warm familial feelings for the embassy. The close relationships we had within the embassy were in spite of the ambassador, not because of the ambassador. I mean I have worked with other ambassadors in the past who would go out of their way to have people over to the residence and develop kind of embassy esprit de corps, and particularly in the small missions try to be a much greater sense of collegiality. Bill Shannon didn't do that at all.

Q: I would think one of the problems would be, and this is true of both career and non career ambassadors, at what point to you listen to your staff and when do you follow your own head.

BERRINGTON: Yes, that is quite right. Shannon was no dummy. He was a very clever, very smart man, but he did not have experience in the business of diplomacy. There were some things that he just, even the best of men could not have immediately understood some of the vagaries of dealing with foreign governments or this or that. He was not one that was willingly bringing us into his decision making process on this. So it made for a difficult relationship. It made for a particularly difficult relationship, and I won't put words in his mouth, he will have to speak for himself, the deputy chief of mission who was a very capable. His name was Charles Rushing. Charlie had a very tough time because he knew there was this problem among the mission as a whole, the problem of feeling left out of the ambassador's thoughts and ideas and very few of us having many warm feelings about the ambassador, but yet Charlie knew that he had to be the deputy chief of mission. The chief of mission was the ambassador and so Charlie had to satisfy

him as well as try to make us feel that we had somebody who was arguing our case as well. If I thought my assignment in Dublin was difficult, Charlie's was probably even more so. I had extremely good relationships with Charlie, and I was very happy with Charlie's support on many of the problems that came up.

Q: What was Ambassador Shannon's background, not just where he came from?

BERRINGTON: I think he was Boston. I don't even remember his university. I think he probably had a Ph.D. but basically it was his time with the New York Times and he was writing novels. Many of the writings and columns that he did were on Europe. Then as I said, he wrote a couple of books about Ireland. But I would have to go back and do some homework. He was married of course. I have forgotten to mention this. His wife, Elizabeth, was a kind of an equal element in all of this. Elizabeth was a much more outgoing social kind of person, yet she tended to keep her distance as well. She was also difficult to figure out as how you stood with her. I tend to be a fairly outgoing gregarious kind of guy. At parties I tend to be very outspoken, candid in saying things. I would be this way with Elizabeth or with him, and I would never get much feedback. Ha, ha, that is funny or kind of Mmmm. It was always kind of neutral reaction. They were both very puzzling people.

Q: Was his Ph.D. and background in European affairs, did he seem to take much of an interest in the European Community and all that or was he really sticking to his Irish interests?

BERRINGTON: From my vantage point I would have to say no, but maybe Charlie Rushing or the political and economic person have different views. But no, he was like most of the ambassadors there, pretty much a one issue person: first, what was going on up north and second, the Irish-American relationship. And you know, if I were in his shoes, I would probably be pretty much the same way because that was such an overwhelming concern for all of us.

Q: You left there in '81.

BERRINGTON: Early '81, and of course, this is sort of one of the key experiences of my foreign service career. I suppose I might as well go into this right now. I was due to be leaving in I think it was April or so. Sort of a strange time to be going but because I was single and didn't have to worry about kids and all of that, I think they thought it was a good time for me to. You know, my successor and all that. So I was supposed to be out by late spring, and it was gosh late January, early February.

Well I should preface this by saying I do what many Foreign Service officers do, every end of the year which is write a Christmas letter. My Christmas letter is something I type up myself. It is something I Xerox myself and stuff the envelopes myself, and stamp and mail myself to my you know my 50 or 60 friends around the world and the U.S. that I have been keeping up with over the years. It is usually a catalogue of what happened the

last year. We are all familiar with this. That year because it was my last year in Dublin, I figured it would be appropriate to do a kind of summing up of my time in Dublin and how I saw things. My Christmas letters have usually not been and, Oh, Uncle Harry and Aunt Harriet visited, and I had a nice home leave at Lake Winnypoopoo or whatever. I mean I would go into some of the issues and things we deal with in the Foreign Service. Well that's what I did. Since this was a private matter going to friends who I didn't think would reveal any embarrassing confidences, I was fairly frank about a lot of what had been going on in Ireland. Not inside the embassy. I must say my relationship with the ambassador is not something I would like other people to be aware of. A lot of people were aware of this because the problems had been occurring for a few years, people in Washington as well as elsewhere, but it wasn't something I would write on. So I did the letter, sent it off, and I was going out to a party one night, and I had a phone call from a friend of mine who was the editor of something called Business and Finance, I believe. It was things going on in business. This was an Irish business journal. He was an Irishman. Actually he was an Australian, but had been in Ireland for so many years that he was an Irishman at that point. He said, "Robin, I think you should realize that I received a mailing from you today which contains what looks like a personal letter from you. It has got all these comments about Ireland in it, and I don't know why you sent this to me, but I will send it back to you so you know what it is; it has gone out in your name." I didn't have a clue what he was talking about.

I went off to the party and I thought about it. Then maybe about 10:00 at night I recalled Hmmm, I wonder if he got a copy of my Christmas letter. If he did, how in the world could that have happened? Well, besides trying to figure this out, I didn't pay to much more attention. I woke up the next morning, went in to the embassy, and there spread across the front page of the January 28, 1981 Irish Times is a big story, not the banner headlines but about halfway down the front page, a big story with my picture, "American Diplomat Tells All About Ireland," or something like that. It then goes on to say that the Irish Times has received a copy of this letter and wanted to show how the Americans view Ireland and how the embassy talks about the Irish-American issue. It made a point of lifting things out of context, quoting certain things that I had written in my letter and portraying all of this in a very critical manner. That was the Irish Times which was the paper of choice. That was the morning. By that afternoon, the tabloids started running it, and they were with banner headlines, "American Embassy Diplomat says We Irish Are Small Potatoes" or something to that effect. That day, I think that was a Tuesday, all day Tuesday I was just inundated with phone calls. The ambassador, of course, immediately wanted to know what was in this. It was at that point very clear that it was my Christmas letter. I went up to him and I explained that I don't have a clue how this got out. Yes, it is accurate, but it is not a letter that I sent any of these people. By the next morning, Wednesday, it happened to be about the same time that there was a major political issue in the Dáil, the Parliament, and by that time the Dáil had superseded the Berrington news, and we thought it was just going to be a 24 hour wonder, because the ambassador and I in spite of all the calls from the newspapers and all that, we just said, "We have nothing to say; there is no comment." I think the ambassador said something to the effect of I am not privy to Mr. Berrington's private letters. If this is about Ireland, that is his personal

problem not, you know. Trying to distance himself from all of this. By Wednesday we thought it would all be over. No! AP in the meantime, picked this up and sent it to the United States, put it on the wire services that goes around the world. By the time the American press took this up you know, "American Embassy Official in Dublin Says Embarrassing Things About Dublin. Irish All Upset. Here Are Copies of the Headlines." What we thought was a 24 hour wonder in Dublin suddenly became even more of an issue in the United States because the Irish-American community said, "What is this guy in Dublin, our government representative saying all of these horribly critical things about Ireland?"

Q: What sort of things did the media highlight?

BERRINGTON: Well, one of the things, one of the disputes between me and the ambassador for a number of years is because I saw our mission there as so small, I wasn't sure that we needed a full time USIS presence. This was the time of Carter, zero budgeting and all that. There were cutbacks in waste, looking at ways for imaginative restructuring of missions and whatnot. The ambassador, of course, would have no truck with this. So, because apart from my press work I felt there wasn't that much for me to do to keep busy all the time, I had described my job as small potatoes. Well, then this was lifted out of my letter and started running in the press, it became Ireland is small potatoes. That was something that was constantly repeated again and again and sort of took on a life of its own. Also I commented about how the weather and Irish food were well matched with each other, grey and dreary.

Q: Which is true.

BERRINGTON: Oh, yes. And you know, I made some negative remarks about the IRA and oh gosh, it is hard for me to recall it all.

Q: In other words of no really derogatory. These were just personal.

BERRINGTON: Clearly negative derogatory comments but done in a light humorous bantering kind of way which anybody who saw this letter would know. In the meantime, as I say, the Americans picked up the story and started running with it. Apparently my mother was ironing one night and suddenly heard American diplomat Robin Berrington and she looked up and there I was. Peter Jennings was reading parts of my letter on ABC TV. Almost every American paper covered it.

Q: I recall something, I mean now that you are saying this, I mean it couldn't have gone anywhere without noting this.

BERRINGTON: It was on the cover, well not the cover, the front page of the February 1, 1981 New York Times. You know, it just took on a real editorial life of its own. Once the Americans picked it up, then the Irish felt, “Oh we have to look at this again.” So it was kind of like one side of the Atlantic suddenly energizing another side and this sort of back

and forth as far as what was a dead issue at one point suddenly takes on a new life again. By I would say, Wednesday night, Thursday morning, I was told that the State Department wanted me out of the country, that I had become so much of a point of controversy that it would be best if I left and was out of there so that there would be no more concern about this. Well, the idea that I was suddenly being called back to Washington started a new wave of interest, “Irish American diplomat being called back to be chastised, to be fired.” “American diplomat being called back…” for whatever the press decided the point they wanted to hit best. Many of the people at that point were saying "Wait a minute. What did Berrington write? He didn't really write anything that most of us don't joke about ourselves anyway. There is nothing new here." Suddenly a number of Irishmen, journalists, started saying, "Wait a minute. Aren't we making more of this than deserves to be made." So kind of another wave of support developed for me. For example, a friend of mine who is the editor of the Independent got a copy of the entire letter and printed it verbatim from beginning to end to show that this was clearly a personal letter and not as the Irish Times portrayed this in follow up stories the next day and afterwards, you know they were trying to say this was really an in house document and it was an example of the kind of reporting that the embassy sent back to the Department of State. This shows that Berrington was really an intelligence officer. The Times was just going berserk with this because the Times was the paper that broke it was starting to get a lot of criticism from the other media. Why have you done this to this poor guy when it was clearly if anybody had any smarts they would realize it was just a personal kind of end of the year holiday letter. Anyway, in spite of this backlash of support, the National Union of Journalist, for example, sent a telegram to the White House saying Berrington has been the best foreign service officer we had here in 50 years. He is the only one who calls a spade a spade. We can trust him. Why are you firing him or taking him back to the U.S.? Letters to the editor just went for days saying Berrington, attributing to me greater virtues and positive traits than I ever thought of myself. Anyway, I had to go because the Department was not going to change policy on this. So I left Dublin Airport on a Saturday, 48 hours. I was given 48 hours to go.

Q: This was by the State Department.

BERRINGTON: Yes. I was not PNGed (declared persona non grata). The Irish government, well there were a couple of ministers of state who huffed and puffed for the first 24 hours to try and get political advantage from it. You know, 24-36 hours after they all kind of chuckled at how silly this all was too. So I had 48 hours to leave the country. It just got so bizarre by that time that there were so many Irishmen thinking there must be something more to this, because why does the State Department call him back. I can remember one night, I went home,…I was still trying to follow my usual schedule even thought it was increasingly difficult to do so. I went home and there was a guy waiting at my door with a camera man to take a picture of me and to try to interview me. I was out for lunch one day and I was just walking down the street from the restaurant, and a journalist walked up to me and said, "Are you Berrington? We would like to find out what really happened." So the newspapers had clearly assigned people to follow me around. When I left Dublin Airport, we had arranged with Air Lingus for me to sneak in

through the back door. I was wrapped up in a scarf; because this was early February it was cold. I was wrapped up in a scarf with dark glasses and a hat pulled down, and I had to sneak through. In the meantime, we asked a friend of mine in the embassy, a colleague, to go to the desk and check me in. Everybody was all prepared for this. Meantime there was a huge group of photographers and reporters waiting to waylay me at the airport. They waylaid him, and in the meantime I snuck onto the plane. It was that sort of silliness. It was astonishing that the Irish media turned this into the circus that they did.

Q: A little of this happened to me in Greece one time. I got quoted on page 23 of the Christian Science Monitor which I was quoted that "Balkan justice is not American justice." The next thing you know, this was headlines. What Americans think about a small country is important to them.

BERRINGTON: Yes. But the problem is not just attitudes in Ireland. Clearly if it had been left just to the Irish themselves, as I say 24 hours later this would have died down. I would have been clearly something of an object of some ridicule or derision. But I could have made the remaining two or three months I had in my assignment.

Q: I take it the ambassador wasn't taking a very strong stance.

BERRINGTON: Well, now to understand this we have to backtrack a bit. As I had said earlier, the ambassador was not terribly enthusiastic about having me come in the first place. Again not me, but me as USIS officer because he wanted somebody else to fill the job. He had his own candidate, allegedly somebody from NASA. But anyway, there I am, and for most of the three years plus that I worked with him, he would, I think it is safe to say that his interest in public affairs, press work, well you know, a lot of ambassadors take more interest in PAO than they do in a lot of other embassy officers, because we can do more for their public image and all of that. So he was constantly after me to do this or do that. Sometimes which I just couldn't do because of the nature of his demands and because it was incapable for any PAO to have done some of the things that he wanted done. There were at least two times when I had heard from Washington that the Ambassador, he never said it to me. As I said, he was not a terribly communicative person, but I heard from Washington that the ambassador had called up Washington and expressed very grave disappointment with my performance and that if things didn't improve, he wanted me out of there. There was also one time when, I frankly don't even remember the circumstances, but I had been off on a trip to Cork or Galway or someplace, an official trip. When I got back there was a series of notes that the ambassador had written and left for me. It was clear, you could see from the writing, the handwriting on the notes that he was so upset and so angry that his hand was shaking as we was writing. As I said, he was a very close, kind of introverted kind of guy. I think when his emotions really did spill out, they never spilled out in moderation but in kind of the extreme if you will. He was writing things like if I didn't do things differently or if I didn't improve on this or that, I would be out of there in 24 hours, and I better change my ways or else.

I showed this to Charlie Rushing, and Charlie said he had never seen anything like that in his whole career for an ambassador to write those kinds of things to an officer over what was clearly not much of an issue. As I say I have even forgotten what it was that prompted this. So you have to realize there was this background of him being unhappy with USIS forcing him to take a PAO, and then once I was there, since I was the embodiment of the PAO, there was unhappiness with me constantly. You know, looking over my shoulder, telling me what to do, never being satisfied, constantly carping about this and about that, and trying to get rid of me. In fact the only reason he didn't get rid of me was the fact that USIS had made it clear that if he loses me, he is not going to get a replacement. When this incident came up, his reaction must have been Aha! I was right, Berrington is incompetent. He is incapable of doing the job as he should. People should have listened to me. So his official reaction was to distance himself from this as soon as possible, and he did it in not a terribly offensive way. But within the embassy, he immediately called a meeting that morning in which I was pointedly told not to attend and in which he told everybody else in the mission they were not to have a thing to do with me.

Q: Oh my God!

BERRINGTON: I had gotten myself in my own trouble, and I made my bed; I would have to lay in it. People then from that meeting came back and told me you know, the ambassador... Of course there was great sympathy for my position in the mission because my relationships with most of the other people, not everybody, but most other people were pretty good. So I knew I couldn't get much support. The DAO, with whom who I had a particularly good relationship, said at one point, “If Berrington goes; I go. I am not going to allow this kind of nonsense to shape the way our personnel are seen at this mission.” I told him, "Bill, Don't put your career on the line like that." So I knew that I could not count on any support from the ambassador. I have learned since that one of the reasons why I got called back by my own government was that the ambassador had in effect called in to Washington and said, "I have no confidence in this man anymore, and there is no need to keep him here. If he is sent back to the U.S. that would make me very happy, and others as well." So that is in effect why I got called back.

Q: Did you ever find out how that letter got out to people?

BERRINGTON: No, I never have found out, and of course this is one of the really great mysteries of my career. I have my own ideas. Once this happened, of course, it was clear that it was an inside job. In fact it was a coincidence, but on the day that this happened, we had security people in from the mission in London. The security officer is responsible for Ireland as well as England. They met with me immediately because I had said, "Whao, something is very fishy that this letter gets out."

Q: Particularly going to your friend who you wouldn't have sent it to.

BERRINGTON: I will go on about that. But anyway, I said, "No this was a personal letter." I showed him how I typed it myself. I Xeroxed it myself. I sent it out myself. I said, "Even the original which I Xeroxed from was in my safe." I kept all my personal things; I was very good about keeping things in the safe which I had in my office, a secure safe. The security representative from London was so concerned about this that something had happened that shouldn't have happened. I mean not, the issue was how it got out.

Q: How did this happen, because it looks like somebody was trying to compromise you.

BERRINGTON: So he went to the ambassador and said, "Look there is clearly been somebody has access to Berrington's safe which shouldn't have, or somebody has done something to sully the image of the mission. I think this has become a security issue as well as a public relations issue, and I want to look into it." The ambassador wouldn't let him. The ambassador said, "No, I won't allow you to investigate." So the ambassador apparently wasn't interested in getting to the bottom of this himself. Anyway, in trying to figure out, and my colleagues at the embassy have since I left. I mean there really wasn't much time for me to do much asking and checking around because once I learned I had to leave, I was busy trying to pack and prepare myself for departure. But, in the weeks after I left, I heard, you know I got letters and things from people. The consensus seemed to be, and this is only the allegation, not proof, was that my secretary, an Irish woman, was the one who was responsible for this.

Let's hypothesize just to give you some idea. Let's say I was working on this letter in my office, and I was suddenly called out of the office to go out and see the ambassador or somebody else. Let's say the secretary walks into my room, which she would dozens of times every day, would happen to notice this, suddenly think, Hmmm, this could cause a little bit of fun, and choose to send it out. Because my secretary and I did not get along. We had a very stormy relationship, although I should add she had a stormy relationship with everybody in the office and with many people in the building. Her temperament, her emotional stability was such that I had at one point recommended that she seek therapy. What I didn't realize was that in Ireland, when you suggest this it is like suggesting the absolute worst thing.

Q: Yes, it means you're crazy.

BERRINGTON: Yes, and apparently she was gravely offended by my suggestion that she have some therapy or talk about her problems with a professional, that she was my enemy ever since then. So she had a motive to perhaps do this. If she was the one, and I am not saying she was or not. There may have been someone else that I didn't realize who might have done it too, maybe to sully the embassy not just me personally. But, whoever did this I think probably didn't realize it was going to develop into the kind of international story that it did. I think whoever did it probably thought it would cause a little bit of mischief, 24-36 hours and be done with, because that is the way most things are done. But, we found out afterwards, it had been sent out to about 12 or 13 people, and only 12

or 13 people in the Dublin political journalistic columnist world. In other words, whoever did it knew exactly what kind of audience they were sending it to.

Q: Of course, your secretary would know because that was her milieu.

BERRINGTON: Would know, exactly. If say the person called me up and was friendlier with me than some of the others and said, "Look, I go this and I am going to send it back to you and not do anything with it." So if maybe one or two work out that way, given the number of people it was sent to and their position, there must have been two or three who couldn't resist. Here is a story. Look at what this American diplomat has written. Of course, that is in effect what happened. Now because the ambassador refused to allow any investigation and because once I left, the topic as far as something within the embassy, officially within the embassy the door was shut, case over, nothing was ever done to find out what really happened, and that was the end of it. Anyway, I came back to the United States.

Well, first I went to London because congressional law requires us to use American carriers and the direct flights back are from London. So I went to London, spent about two days in London staying with friends, kind of decompressed. Needless to say the three or so days after the story broke in Dublin and before I left on that Saturday were hell on earth for me.

You can imagine. I can remember one night I came home from a dinner or whatever, and the phone rang and I picked it up. It was some talk show person from Chicago. "Are you Robin Berrington?" "Yes." "Well, we are on the air, Robin. We want to find out what you really did and what do you think about..." I just hung up. It was that kind of constant attention, I was getting. I started getting mail in Dublin, some of the most abusive mail that you could ever imagine. I mean saying things you wonder why people would write and say these things to total strangers

For the first time in my life I began to realize what it must be like to be a celebrity and get this kind of mail all the time. That continued long after I was in the States. Now the upside to this was the reaction from the national news journalists and from a lot of other Irish friends and others who totally supported me and were ashamed and embarrassed at the way the Irish media had handled this and that I was being forced to come back to the U.S. as a result of all this. I had some absolutely wonderful letters. If this had never happened and I had just left Ireland a few months later, I probably wouldn't have had nearly the file of testimonials and great letters that I have today. Anyway I went to London. There were a couple of cartoons in the English press on me. There is one cartoon of me standing at a travel agent's desk and up on the wall were posters for a bunch of countries. It had Ireland, and the travel agent was sort of holding his hands up against the Ireland poster and was sort of saying, "Now where do you want to go, Mr. Berrington? We can recommend something."

Finally I got back to the U.S. I had no idea, I mean, since my communication from Washington had been extremely vague, just get back here. They didn't say what I had to get back here for. When I arrived in Washington, and went to USIA headquarters, I didn't know if I was going to be fired; if I was going in to have my hands slapped. I mean my assignment, my ongoing assignment after Dublin was already set for Japan. I was going back to Tokyo. I didn't know if that assignment was going to be broken. It was, you know, total mystery. As it turned out, when I went in to the office and by that time, more and more people started to realize what had really happened. As they put it they slapped my hands and said, "Don't you ever write anything like this. Stop writing your Christmas letters. Don't send any more of those bloody things out." They said, "Look, lie low and come back in a month or two, and we'll get you off to Tokyo."

I thought that was the end of it. In official terms, that was the end of it. But I have to say kind of like the Supreme Court Justice that talked about obscenity. "I don't know what it is; I don't know how to define it, but I know it when I see it." I forget who it was. He said, "That quote is going to haunt me for the rest of my life." In a way that letter has haunted me for the rest of my life. I can remember years later going to maybe a hotel bar in New York or Hong Kong or whatever, and you strike up a conversation. People would say, "What do you do?" I would say, "I am foreign service" "Where had you been?" "Oh, I have been to Tokyo, Thailand, and Dublin." "Oh Dublin. Were you there when that guy got in trouble? What kind of a guy was he like?" I would always say, "Oh, he wasn't a bad guy." I continued to get mail that was forwarded to me from all sorts of people. I mean that went on for about a year afterwards. It is funny, just about three or four days ago, I got an e-mail from a friend who had just purchased a copy of Cassell's Dictionary of Quotations or some such title, and I am in there. One of my quotes from that letter was in there. He said, "This is apparently a new edition that has come out. Did you really..." I had no idea. So this thing has followed me. Not as it turned out, not negatively.

Q: You have entered Irish folklore.

BERRINGTON: In a way I have entered Irish folklore. Two years later I went back to Dublin. I was on my way home from Tokyo. I went the other way around the world as I often would do to Europe because it is more fun that way than just going across the Pacific. I stopped in Dublin. I stopped there to say good-by. I had to leave there so quickly there were a lot of people I didn't see. The econ officer who was a very good friend of mine who was there when I was there threw a big party for me. I saw a lot of great people. It was you know, really fun. At one point, some guy came up to me at the party, and said, "Are you Robin?" I said, "Yes." "You don't know me, but my editor has told me to come to this party and ask you the following questions." I said, "I think you should go. This is a private party, and this is not appropriate." He was clearly there to write another story. There was a guy taking pictures of me even two years afterwards. I mean as I came in and out of the embassy somebody was posted there to take pictures. I just don't know what it is that that sort of thing continues to be such a big issue for me. But, anyway, I came back to the U.S.; I lay low, and I went back to Tokyo.

One final thing. As I said, this issue has not been a total negative experience for me. Before I arrived in Tokyo, the ambassador there was Mike Mansfield, a man who I must say was totally different from Bill Shannon. Some embassy person got wind that I was coming to Japan, and said, "Mr. Ambassador, do you know that this man Berrington who got in so much trouble in Dublin is now assigned to come to Tokyo? You know, if he has gotten in that much trouble in Dublin, is he really the sort of person you want on your staff here and you really ought to rethink this." This person said this in front of a couple of other people. One of the other people who was there was a friend of mine. He said, "Well, I got a copy of Berrington's letter, and I didn't think it was so bad." Mike Mansfield said, "Let me see a copy of this letter before I say anything, I want to read what this guy actually wrote." So Mike got a copy of it, and read it. He said, "Hmmm, anybody that can write this well, I want him on my staff." Ever since then my relationship with Senator Mansfield was probably one of the closest relationships I have had with any ambassador in my career. He was Irish-American, but he knew exactly what the problems were and how the Irish reacted to these kinds of things, and he was not going to let something as silly and trivial as this letter and the brouhaha over it stand in the way of my career. Thereafter in Tokyo Ambassador Mansfield told all embassy officers that all writing, ambassador speeches, toasts and all that should be sent through Berrington for him to look at. Thereafter I became one of the ambassador's close associates in everything he did. It really put a kind of stamp to any kind of official attitude about whether Berrington was a very good officer or not. As much as I have certain feelings about Bill Shannon, I have equally strong warm feelings about Mike Mansfield.

Q: You were telling me about the aftermath of this incident. As far as you know the secretary whom you strongly suspect was the agent provocateur was still there. But what happened to Ambassador Shannon?

BERRINGTON: Well, a very strange development as it turned out. But like many American ambassadors, he had close friends on both sides of the political line, opposition as well as government ruling party. There was a sudden call for an election about three or four months after I left, and because the ambassador was very close to the opposition party candidate for prime minister, he went out campaigning with him. [Editor's Note: The Irish general election of 1981 was held on 11 June 1981, three weeks after the dissolution of the Dáil on 21 May. A Fine Gael–Labour Party coalition government came to power with Garret FitzGerald becoming Taoiseach.] Obviously, if you are the ambassador accredited to the country, one of the big no-no's is you don't go out campaigning with the opposition party candidates. You don't go out campaigning with any candidates. Interference in internal affairs with some particular politics like that is something you don't do. However many ambassadors have a tendency to feel about Ireland as though it is their own personal fiefdom, or like that it is almost the 51st state. The normal rules of diplomatic conventions don't apply, so he went out campaigning with this guy. His name was Gary Fitzgerald, of the Fine Gael Party. In fact, he later he did become prime minister as a result of that election. But the government party was so outraged that the American ambassador was out appearing on the platform that the

opposition party's candidate that they PNGed him. He left Ireland on June 7, 1981, almost as much under a cloud as me. That was the fate of poor Bill Shannon.

Q: Today is June 27, 2000. Robin, you are off to Japan. You were assigned to the Embassy in Tokyo from when to when?

BERRINGTON: Well, I arrived in June of '81 and left the summer of '86.

Q: Did you write anymore Christmas letters?

BERRINGTON: Well, it was interesting. When I came back as we discussed earlier…I was summoned back. I was told just don't write these things anymore. Of course I did. I didn't change how I wrote these things, and I have kept writing them year after year. In fact I am still doing it even after this year. While I was in Washington, I went through a couple of months of language refresher, because I hadn't used my Japanese for some time. I just kind of laid low and waited for all the dust to settle and trundled off to Tokyo in June of '81.

Q: Was Mansfield the ambassador the whole time you were there?

BERRINGTON: Yes, he was there the whole time I was there. He had been appointed by Jimmy Carter in 1976. Then when Ronald Reagan won the election in 1980, much to some people's surprise, Reagan said, "Mansfield is such a good ambassador, even though he is a Democrat and an appointee of my predecessor, a Democrat, this Republican administration will keep him on." So they asked him to stay on for well as long as he and they wanted. So he was in place for, well he had already been there four years or five years I guess when I arrived. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Mansfield presented his credential on June 19, 1977.]

Q: Well now, your job was Public Affairs Officer?

BERRINGTON: Oh, no. I am afraid I never rose to those heights except in Dublin. I guess they would never let me do it again. No, I was assigned as director of the American center. The American Center was the USIS cultural center, I guess, in other countries. The America House for Germany, the Thomas Jefferson Center for Manila. You know they had various names, but they are all essentially the same kind of thing. In Japan, we had six of these. Five of them were in the leading regional cities starting from the north, Sapporo, then leaping pretty far south, Nagoya, then Osaka, Kyoto, and Fukuoka. The sixth center was in the capital city, Tokyo. Of course, I had been the director of the Fukuoka American Center a number of years previously. This time I was back as the head of the Tokyo American Center. That was considered the flagship of all of them. It had the largest library, the largest staff, the busiest program, the most important audience. It stands to reason that it would be a little bit more equal than other centers.

Q: Okay, well, let's talk about when you arrived there, how would you describe the state of Japanese-American relations? Tell us about what you were doing and the issues.

BERRINGTON: Well, you know, Japanese-American relations are always been on a fairly even keel. The issues over the years have not changed that much. The official, well not just official but the formal as well as informal relationship has usually been an excellent one. There are a lot of reasons for that.

First and foremost I suppose, is that with the exception of a few years after the occupation in the 1950s, the Japanese government has always been under the control of the Liberal Democratic Party, which is a conservative party, despite its name, and is composed of a series of factions centered on the influential leaders of the party. All of these factions and basically the party's control comes from any one of these factions which may be large or small depending on elections and a leader's death or a leader's illness or something like that. Certainly not on any ideological or policy issue grounds. But all of these factions have as a fundamental pillar of their policies, a pro-American policy. So, there was never any real shifting of governmental attitudes about the United States. They were very much behind America and we were almost kind of like, you know some people suggested it wasn't that much different that MacArthur and the occupation. The American embassy, the American ambassador was almost like some kind of pro-consul and the Japanese government was very eager to listen and not very eager to disagree. Now maybe that is not doing complete justice to some of the disagreements we would have, but by and large it was a very friendly, very close relationship between governments. This extended to the people too. Throughout relations at the times I was there, other people had been extremely cordial and friendly. It is very hard for me to remember in all the years I have been in Japan, any overtly hostile or unfriendly acts by anybody. You might bump into a slightly aggressive drunk, but he might be unfriendly to anybody not just Americans. Of course, there was the Japanese Communist party and a few other kind of professional anti-foreign types, but they really were more anti-foreign than strictly anti American.

Another reason why relations were usually pretty good and pretty close was that within East Asia, and of course our policy in Japan was based on a number of regional issues as opposed to only bilateral issues; within East Asia, there was a fairly common concern about China, of course, and North Korea, and although there may have been times when they saw China in slightly different ways than we did, and we'll go into that further later on. Nevertheless, China was regarded as a rather unfriendly power in the area. There was absolutely no question about North Korea. We tended to be in total agreement about that one. By this time, the major strain on the relationship, Vietnam, was long since over. So the regional issues were pretty much not major irritants.

The bilateral issues, well you know, with Japan, it's funny they have been kind of like the bad penny that keeps coming up again and again. It is just a different year on the penny. These bilateral issues that seemed to disturb the relationship, it was always trade. The Japanese were eager to restrict imports of whatever was the issue at hand, and the Americans, of course, were always trying to open up the market so that more whatever it

was could be brought in. Over the years this could be anything. I am not making this up as silly as this might sound today, baseball bats, grapefruits, textiles, and probably the most particularly American part of all, lawyers. These are all things the Japanese wanted to, to the extent they could, keep out of the market for various reasons, most of which had to do with competition with the local product. So whatever we were talking about in the trade issue, the trade area, it was like we could pull out the scripts and the arguments and the factors impinging on all of this and lift out the word baseball and put in the word computers or chips or oranges or whatever. So it was almost like a ritualistic routine that both governments would go through. It was as if they knew what we were going to say and we knew what they were going to say. We both went through the motions, and strangely enough after a number of bargaining sessions, we would reach some kind of compromise which would satisfy both parties. Things would be fine for another year or two until another issue came up, which would be start exactly the same process, what we would call kabuki, where we would read the same lines and go through the same dance and it would get resolved.

Q: What was the role as we saw it and you saw it at that time during the 1980s, early Reagan, of the American centers in your perspective?

BERRINGTON: Well, I had told you earlier about how the American Centers when I was in Fukuoka went through a major not just cosmetic change, changing the name from Cultural Center to American Center, but also went through a much more kind of modernization, I guess you would say where everything from fax machines were introduced. This was back in the 1970s when fax machines were introduced, Our audiences were more carefully identified, and the speakers and the programs we did were clearly fine tuned to the mission's policy concerns. Of course this was not how it was before. You could have had somebody come in and talk about Moby Dick or Nathaniel Hawthorne and nobody would complain. When things changed in the 1970s that kind of programming, unless somebody just kind of did it secretly, just never happened again. Which in my opinion was a very good move. You know it brought them up to date. So by the time the 1980s had gotten around, there had actually been a kind of almost Sisyphean, is that the right adjective, a number of reverses. Alan Carter, the man who was responsible for the modernization, had long since left. A couple of PAO's had come in that were either anti-Alan Carter, didn't like what he was doing. In fact, these were usually people who had been in Japan before Carter and if anything wanted to take the program back to status quo ante.

I mean there wasn't as much demand if you could just fly by the seat of your pants and do whatever you wanted to do. If the PAO happened to like the issue of science, okay, then we did a lot of science. If the next PAO happened to like literature, then everything was on literature. That's no way to run a railroad. That's the sort of mismanaged or disorganized program that Carter was trying to eliminate. So his successors inherited the Carter program, but some of them tried to actually turn the clock back. Of course, they couldn't do it completely. There were too many people who were strongly in favor of the program as it then existed. Even a program as radical and different as Carter's was at the

time, after a few years does take on a bureaucratic life of its own. We all know that very well. So despite the efforts of some of these successors to push things back, although they might have caused a little bit of mischief here and there, it really was maybe one step back and two steps forward, and maybe another one step back and then two steps forward as the people changed. Of course, the new program was something that the State Department and other people liked very much too. They were no more eager to see it turned back than the rest of us. Anyway, by the time I got to Tokyo, this was kind of the situation in which the program was in. All of the communications modernization was still very much in place. We still had very clearly refined audience systems, which by then was computerized. Back then everything had become computerized. We could pull up the audiences; let's say if we were going to do a program on the U.S.-Japan security relationship. We could pull up an audience of interest there. An audience in which we could identify who of those were strongly interested and those who were only mildly. That was still in place and probably in better shape than before. The libraries had been well funded so that they were stocked with the best, kind of up to date books on most of these policy issues. The staff was, the Japanese staff as well as the American staff, was pretty much committed to this kind of program, and although a few might have had nostalgic longings for the old days, because most of the staff remembered those days, they were not pressing to go back. The program was in pretty good shape. In short I would say the USIS program was probably about as healthy as you could find. In those days Japan was still a country where the quality of officer was pretty good. First of all you had to study the language. That would eliminate some of the people that were not good at that sort of thing. The issues, because of the Japanese angle and the unique aspects of the history of U.S.-Japan relations, required a bit of serious study, rather than a quick 24 hour introduction. Because of all of this, I think it tended to get people, like myself, who were repeats and who were familiar with things and knew how to work there. So morale was pretty good. Most of us people were happy with what was going on. I would say as a result USIS was considered a fairly integral, valuable part of the mission valued by the ambassador and the various political, economic, commercial, DAO sections for what we could do with the press and other audiences. Also valued by the ambassador and other elements of the mission for what we could do to put them in contact with various kinds of people we knew around town.

Q: Did you find the dichotomy between a fascination with Japan on one hand but at the same time almost a missionary or reformist desire to shape Japan to our image on the other. You know, women aren't being treated in the way they should be or there should be more competition in stores or what have you. I mean was there a problem with us struggling to sit in the impulse to change the society?

BERRINGTON: Oh, yes, some of that went on, but as I think I mentioned last time, rather than just get out there and say you know wagging our finger at them now, now, now, you should do more with women or now, now, now, you should provide more rights to your Korean minority groups or whatever. Let's face it, those were basically internal issues, and rather than us telling them how they would you know, cure their own illnesses, we did more by kind of illustrating by example how we handled these things in

the U.S. Japan has been a country that really looked outside to see which way the wind was blowing. From the Meiji era on, they have always taken from the West what was considered the most relevant developments, brought them home, and then crafted or shaped them into something that was very definitely Japanese which you could see how it had gotten its start from someplace else. You can see this in whether it was the development of the constitution back in the Meiji era, whether it was the development of the army, whether it was the development of the medical system. Incidentally, of all of those three things, the constitution came largely from Germany. The medical system came largely from France. They were interested in seeing what other countries were doing and would take all of this. So after the war and after the occupation, the United States was considered the place where things were important. We were now the leading power, not Germany or England or France or anything. So they were always looking to see how we handled issues knowing full well that whatever was happening in the U.S. may very well start popping up in Japan four or five years later.

Q: I usually gave ten years. Any time we have a problem or a fad, this is serving abroad, you just knew this was going to spread.

BERRINGTON: The only reason I use five years, it probably was ten years at an earlier period, is because things are moving much faster. Of course, the 1980s is still the time before E-mail and the revolution in communications. But still things were happening quickly. There used to be an expression in Japan: when the United States sneezes, Japan catches a cold. They were very sensitive to anything happening in the United States, sometimes for fear of, and depending on which quarter you were dealing with sometimes in eager anticipation of what would eventually spring up in Tokyo or elsewhere.

Q: There was a time, now maybe this is later on when the Japanese economy was really booming. It looked like the Japanese were going to buy up the United States. This was not that period?

BERRINGTON: Well, this was the beginning of that period what they called bubble. It really reached its peak when I went back to Japan at the end of the 1980s. I was there from 1989 to 1993 as well. That was sort of the heyday of the bubble. We could really see it starting at this point. Of course, what was behind it, I am not an economist or a finance person, and when I get in these waters I have to struggle a bit, but basically what it was, was inflation in land values. The banks owned all of this land. People made loans, or took out loans, the banks made them. The collateral used on all of this was this land, and the land just kept expanding and expanding in value until it was absolutely absurd. I mean it got to the point in the late 1980s where they would say a piece of land the size of a postage stamp in downtown Ginza would be worth something like a million dollars. It was just unrealistic, madness. Then, of course, one day all of this burst as any commonsensical person would have expected. That then led to the problems that Japan is having today. But in the early 1980s this was just getting started. Japan was always an expensive place for tourists in the 1980s because of the rate of exchange. Japan was not necessarily an expensive place for the Japanese. This is something that is always hard to

keep in mind. Yes, housing was expensive, no question about that. Land became expensive, so housing and land, yes that was a major expense for the Japanese. Certain luxury items became very expensive. A bottle of foreign scotch whiskey as opposed to Japanese scotch whiskey would be ridiculously expensive. Or if you had a meal in a certain western style high class restaurant, it was very expensive. But your ordinary day to day purchases, your train ride, your commute, the taxicabs, just the value of ordinary clothes, things in the supermarket, no Japan wasn't that expensive for the Japanese.

My reading is that it was the 1970s oil shock and all of that really led to the financial problems that started some of this inflation and provoked also the unsettling of the currency markets in East Asia. At that point of course, ever since the occupation up until the end of the 1970s, the dollar in Japan was 360 yen. It was sometime in the late 1970s early 1980s when the exchange rate started to drop against the dollar. So that from 360 to the dollar, it went down to the 200 area, and in the late 1980s early 1990s, it was hovering around 100 yen to the dollar. You aren't going to be a major economist or mathematician to figure out that if there is not that much inflation in Japan, yet 20 years ago you were getting 360 yen for a dollar and now you are suddenly only getting 100 yen for a dollar, for the foreigner goods are really becoming very expensive. Not so much so for the Japanese, but for the foreigner, it could be a really tough place. So this is all sort of the background of what was happening to the economics of the situation in Japan. This, of course was a problem in our relationship. I was not as privy to discussions in that field, but certainly USIS would do a number of programs on how to stabilize the exchange rate; how to make sure that the strains of this sort of these floating rates that were just plain chaos for the trading systems, how we could bring some order to all of that. Nothing was finally resolved. I think we all just managed to muddle on through.

Q: Let's look at the role of the American Center. Was there much of a relationship with the universities in the Tokyo area? I mean aren't the top rated universities there?

BERRINGTON: Well, the American Center had as its audience; I think we had eight or nine audience categories. The top two for us were the academic and the media audiences. By academic I mean university. This included both faculty and student. The media of course, consisted of the electronic and the print, magazines, TV stations, editorial writers, and everything. For the universities, once we had refined it down; it was not junior colleges; it was not high schools; it was not vocational colleges, nothing like that at all. Partly because you have to realize the audience universe in a place like Tokyo. Well, one of the universities the Nippon University, which we translated as Japan University, had 100,000 students. I mean let's face it, it was something of a diploma mill. How do you deal with 100,000 students? You can't! So once we refined it down to a university category, then we would refine it to what we considered the best university. What were we doing? We were trying to identify those people who when they graduated or when they moved into the employment field were those who would have some effect on U.S.-Japan relations. We were trying to influence the opinion leaders either of today or of tomorrow. So, we just didn't reach out to any university, a small select group of universities and within the set of small select universities there was a set of small select

faculties within those universities. Tokyo University was of course one of them because Tokyo University for years was is and probably will continue to be the main feeder into the bureaucracy. If you graduate from Todai, that is the Japanese word for Tokyo University, you could almost write your own entree into the foreign ministry or the finance ministry or the ministry of trade and industry, just to name a few of the biggest ministries we were interested in. Of course Todai was a school we were very interested in. Within Todai it would be the faculties of economics and the faculties of politics and international relations because they were the places from which the kids that went into the finance or foreign ministries usually…or law. We didn't deal with faculties of medicine. We didn't deal with faculties of engineering. We didn't deal with faculties of veterinary science. Yes, they might very well turn out somebody who 20 years later might in fact have strongly held opinions about U.S. -Japan relations, but the likelihood of somebody coming from those faculties and having an influential role in relations was very slight.

Q: Sounds like you were making a calculation in Japan, which we had not been making in developing countries. In developing countries, at one point, we were trying to contact anyone with education. We wanted to have good veterinarians; we wanted to have good civil engineers and good technicians, we were interested in bringing people up to what we considered a good standard.

BERRINGTON: Other than my time in Thailand, which was unusual because as you know, it was during the counterinsurgency period and our mission there was very specialized, I have never been in a third world country. Perhaps what you are describing is a U.S. mission in a third world country. So it is hard for me to comment on that. You would have to talk to somebody who had been in, as you know yourself and your own experiences.

We were aimed at informing an audience that was already quite well educated. You have got to remember that the Japanese educational system was a very advanced, very sophisticated educational system. I mean yes, it has its problems, some of them quite serious, some we have back here in the United States, but it was an educational system with many areas of excellence, high standards which turned out well qualified people in various fields. Who was it for us to come in and tell them that their civil engineer programs were no good? So no, that is why we were not engaged in anything like that in a country like Japan. Now, perhaps back in the occupation period there may have been more of that kind of thing going on. I wasn't there; I don't know.

Q: Well, in some of the interviews we have conducted under this program one gets an impression, the war had come and gone and we were trying to bring people back to a certain developmental state and all of that. We were the leading repositories of...

BERRINGTON: Yes, well, that is kind of the big brother little brother, white man, Rudyard Kipling is still alive.

Even when I first came to Japan in the 1960s that was never the case, even under the old programs. So basically what we were doing was trying to inform, not so much to educate as to inform a very defined audience, granted a small, I hesitate to use the word elite because to me elite signifies a kind of almost financial oligarchic sense. They are all sort of in Latin American terms these are the landed aristocrat types. That was not the case in Japan. Japan is a very mobile society. Even the poorest kid in Japan, if he can pass the entrance exams to the university can go on to become foreign minister. In fact this is the story in the case of Prime Minister Tanaka. His background was extremely poor. He went on just on sheer ambition and hard work to become the prime minister. He had no aristocratic or even any wealthy background. So given all of that, the word elite seems kind of inappropriate. An intellectual elite or maybe an educated elite may be more like it.

So in that respect I suppose we were. But as I say it was really informing them about things, so we would go for certain faculties and go for certain...

Q: Well, this is the Reagan period, and first term Reagan. Reagan had been known around the world as a movie actor and all that. What was the USIS approach to portraying this American President?

BERRINGTON: Well, USIS in those days had a fairly routine song and dance that we would do when there were any administration changes. This was largely because of materials that were made available through Washington. We would in whatever the jazzy format was at the time, would put together a folder of members of the cabinet, of leading people in the new administration including the President and Vice President of course, and give these packets out to the media. If we were doing a program on as we did a number of times, the foreign policy of the new administration and the expected Japanese policies of the new administration, of course we would make these materials then available to the people that were invited to this program. So, yes, we were trying to inform them about Reagan, and of course we would try to play down the movie star side. That was not something we made a big deal out of. He had been a governor; he had been a leading political figure in the States for many years. The Japanese also knew him as a governor. That is the important thing. You have got to remember he was governor of California. When I was the director of the center in Tokyo, I did a lot of traveling in the Tokyo area to some of the cities. My district was while it was predominantly the city of Tokyo, it did take in the same consular district of Tokyo which extended several hundred miles north and to the Japan Sea to the west, as well. So I would travel out to these places maybe once or twice a year. Every now and then I would go to a place, and the governor, or the mayor, or the university president or somebody would haul out this dusty old visitors book and ask me to sign. In flipping through the pages I was not at all surprised to discover that Governor Ronald Reagan and Mrs. Reagan might have visited this place on a California trade promotional tour or something like that. So he had been and California being a Pacific state facing East Asia, his travels in that area were not few and far between. So they were familiar with him as more than just a movie star. That is some respects I think probably made it easier for us than say maybe our counterparts in Europe might have had.

Q: Were you working at that time to combat the images of the United States as seen through movies, TV, records and all?

BERRINGTON: Well, that has always been a problem for us in every place. I mean I can remember when I was in Dublin. Probably the most popular television program of the day was something called Dallas. I am sure you remember that.

Q: Yes. Serious people would come up to me and talk about Dallas. I thought it was about a dynasty of oil people, basically a soap opera. This is serious stuff.

BERRINGTON: I don't quite recall if Dallas was still a big deal in Japan. Oh yeas of course, the movies, television. The other point, of course, and this is no news to anybody like you who has served overseas, American movies are extraordinarily popular overseas. They are one of our most successful exports. I think if you have to talk about the most significant products of American civilization in the 20th century, American film, and I say this with some regret, is right up there at the top. In terms of impact, in terms of financial return, in terms of forming opinion, I mean it is just incredible. So that was a major problem. And of course, television quickly became equally influential. In the case of the movies in Japan, except for, and this is what I always thought was a very curious combination, except for Walt Disney and Woody Allen, don't ask why because I don't know, but except for those two, all Hollywood movies were subtitled. So even, the Japanese are a very literate people so you know subtitles were maybe not such a big problem for them. But if it was Mickey Mouse or Woody Allen it was dubbed. You know they actually had Japanese voices rather than subtitles. But nevertheless, movies, all the big Tokyo theaters and even out in the smaller towns, there would always be some kind of a Hollywood movie playing someplace.

Now when it came to TV though, that was a different story. Television became extremely popular, American television programs. They were all dubbed. I always found it amusing because clearly they would look for a Japanese who had the same type of voice, so that if the American actor had a raspy voice, they would look for a Japanese with a raspy voice. They were very good at it actually. So we were constantly dealing with the misperception, the misunderstanding, the kind of you know whether it was violence or glamour or whatever comes out of Hollywood movies and Hollywood television.

Q: When Ronald Reagan too office, he brought with him his new USIA director, Charles Wick, who was a Hollywood product and full of ideas. People interviewed in this program have provided a mixed review. Wick could get money for USIS and he had ideas, but he really wasn't focused on USIS' core mission.

BERRINGTON: Charles Wick probably wouldn't have known a public affairs issue if it bit him in the face. Of course, when he first came in, he was very much the object of derision among the professional corps. Who is this guy this Hollywood wheeler-dealer type whose personal style frankly could be rather coarse at best? Yes, there was a definite

culture clash between the foreign service and somebody like Charles Wick. But as time went by, and this is when you will recall, this is when government budget cuttings started really coming on in earnest, and departments and programs and various activities started to find their funds cut, Charles Wick was an absolute genius at just calling up the White House and telling Ron; or his wife Mary Jane would call up Nancy, and we would always somehow manage to survive.

Charlie Wick was always interesting. As you know, the Washington Post always publishes a list of who was at the White House for X or Y dinner. The Wicks were always there, unless they were out of town. Even more important, if it wasn't an official party like a dinner for the king of Norway or whatever; let's say it was just the Reagans having Thanksgiving dinner. Who was there? Charlie and Mary Jane Wick were always there! So after awhile, yes, maybe we thought this kind of used car salesman type guy…we might not have liked his style or manners such as they were, but we sure were appreciative of his political connections and how he could save our budget. He would come out overseas. We would all cringe when he would meet local personages. He was very much a bull in a china shop particularly in dealing with foreigners. But, certain categories of people, you could see how across the cultural divide and the linguistic differences, Charlie Wick worked out. For example, there was one Japanese theater producer who had very close political ties to the Liberal Democratic Party. He was one of their major fund raisers. Whenever they needed a movie star, he could always get somebody to be there in the Japanese sense. We introduced him one time to Charlie Wick, and the two of them hit it off perfectly. They were just two peas out of the same pod. So he had his ways of relating to certain people, but it was always a bit of a trial for us to put up with Charlie's rather eccentric ways.

Q: Early in the Reagan Administration were we drumming away on the obstinacy of the Soviet Union on the northern islands or had that sort of faded from view?

BERRINGTON: Well, that was one of those issues that never went away. It was always a source of some consolation to certain Americans. Every year various Japanese newspapers would conduct opinion polls, which is the best nation in the world? Which is the nicest nation? Which is the nation we respect the most? That sort of silliness. Invariably number one in all of these popularity contests was Switzerland.

Q: You know the Swiss-Japanese relationship was so key!

BERRINGTON: Yes. And why? Because you know, pretty mountains and little Heidi like figures and Swiss watches and chocolates and the Matterhorn. Switzerland of course is really a threatening country. Maybe there was something in common through the bankers, I don't know. But Switzerland was always number one. Then number two could have been usually us, or maybe England. But if we weren't two, we were number three. Now going way down the scale, coming up after us would be France, or Italy, or Canada. At the other end of the scale it was always a struggle who was going to come out on top so to speak, on the bottom really. Would it be North Korea or Russia? They were always

in a race, and depending on what might have happened in a given year, one would beat out the other. As a result, because of this ongoing strong enmity between the Japanese and the Russians which is if you look back historically there was the Russo-Japanese War at the beginning of the century.

Probably the real key element was right before the end of WWII ended, when Japan clearly was going to be defeated and was on its last legs. I think we had dropped the bomb on Hiroshima but not yet on Nagasaki. At that point the Russians declare war on Japan. The Russians capture and detain huge numbers of Japanese troops in Siberia. There were still many people who remember being POWs in Russian camps for several years who eventually survived and came back to Japan. Well, all of that has meant a lot of enmity, a lot of hostility between the two, much of which is reciprocated by the Japanese for their own insecurities. Another legacy of how the war ended, of course, was the Russian occupation of the northern islands. There is still no peace treaty between those two, Russia and Japan. It is not like there is an active war going on, of course not. But there is no peace treaty and for reasons that just bedevil both sides they have not yet been able to sign a peace treaty to resolve the northern territories issue. By comparison of course, even though our occupation of Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands could be considered almost a mirror image of the Russian occupation of the northern territories, after rather protracted, long, and difficult negotiations, we finally did give back Okinawa. A lot of Japanese used to say, "See the Americans are our friends. They gave back Okinawa, but those dirty old Russians never gave anything back."

Q: So we didn't have to hammer away at that. It just was there.

BERRINGTON: No. Seldom did we have to say or do anything about the Russians. Now, do you remember the shoot down of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 by Soviet interceptors on 1 September 1983 over the Sea of Japan just west of Sakhalin Island? The shoot down initiated a major PR offensive by us. Much of it handled personally by Rick and Jean Kirkpatrick. With all kinds of materials being put out. As in the case of anything we got in Japan we would translate into Japanese before giving them out to the Japanese, video tapes. It was a worldwide offensive on our part to expose the Russian duplicity on that. That was something that was certainly an incident that marked a period of time. Again we didn't really have to do that much. In fact, there were times I felt like we were going at carpet tacks with a sledge hammer. The Russians were just hanging themselves. There wasn't that much we had to do, but still it was a major offensive by us at the time.

The issue which probably, when I think back in terms of long term difficulty, the issue that probably has caused us the most, I mean apart from the trade issues which were a constant thorn on the side. But the issue of China, how to handle China; the Japanese have always looked on China as a kind of mother country. I mean in the same way that England looks on the continent as where so much of their civilization comes from, the Anglo-Saxon background. Japan looks on China in the same way. A mixture of respect and slight condescension because China is the source of the language; that is where Buddhism came from, much of the art and culture, Confucianism, all of that is from

China. Nevertheless, by the 20th century, look where Japan is, a major industrial world power. Look where China is, still backwards, still split by competing forces with a population in some part starving. Clearly Japan could look at China and say maybe we got everything from you, but look where we are today compared to you. So it was with very mixed feelings how they regard China. But as China developed some nuclear weapons, and after the death of Mao and some of the struggles that went on there, and as China started to figure out its own world view vis-a-vis the U.S. or Taiwan or Korea or whatever, we could not always count on Japan to be right behind us on everything as much as we might have wanted it. There was no question that part of the Japanese differences with us had a racial element to it. You know, very much like Vietnam, they saw China as another Asian brother, and in fact if anything it was more like an Asian mother or father than brother. So for the western powers to deal with China in the way they did sometimes caused problems within the Japanese, particularly the media. There was the occasional thorny issue for us, and still is today.

Q: How about with the media? Did you see a change in how the Japanese media was dealing with the United States or using the Center or anything like that?

BERRINGTON: No, not that much change from what I had mentioned before with the media in Fukuoka. The Japanese media probably have the largest press corps in Washington from any country, including Europe or anywhere. If you go down to the National Press building, I mean every floor has some representative of the Japanese television station or newspaper or news agency or something. All of these offices have several members in them. So what this means is most of these people would be assigned to the U.S. for a year or two. They don't tend to keep them very long overseas. Journalists would come over here for a couple of years and then come back. There was a huge number of people who had experience in the U.S. and knew a lot about American politics or how American society worked. As a result, we weren't really dealing with the kind of ill informed third world type of journalist. We were dealing with pretty well educated, pretty opinionated, knowledgeable people in their own right who were not always quite so ready to take the embassy press release or the embassy word at face value. Whereas in some countries you could just give something out and you could count on it being kind of on the front page of the paper the next day, that was hardly ever the case. We had to struggle to get our point of view across. Now, yes they wanted interviews with the ambassador, yes they wanted access to the visiting assistant secretary of state, yes they wanted to meet with the senator or the congressman when he or she came through. We would have some leverage over them in that respect. We didn't automatically give out these exclusive interviews. We were very careful as to how we gave them out, and if somebody had really made us angry recently, they might not get that interview this time. There is a certain amount of realpolitik in press attaché work, of course. By and large, we could count on their interest and we could count on their enthusiasm. As a result, America was reported on, not always correctly, often consciously, I think, incorrectly. But America was reported on on a regular basis, daily in the case of newspapers.

In fact, one of the points we used to keep making to the Japanese was almost information overkill. The Japanese would report on American issues or what was happening in America or anything that could happen in America that had a Japanese angle to it would get reported in the Japanese papers in a huge way. So that let's say Congressman Irving Schwartz from Fargo, North Dakota, who wouldn't know a Japanese from a Korean from a Chinese suddenly gets up in Congress and says, "Those Japanese, they are the most racist people in the world, and we should cut off relations from them." You know, first of all if there is anybody in the house listening that would be one thing. Nobody would pay any attention to it here anyway because Congressman Irving Schwartz on Japan, who cares. But back in Japan, headlines the next day, "Congressman Irving Schwartz demanding that diplomatic ties be cut." Now of course I am making this up, but the point is the Japanese would report anything about Japan in their papers. Whereas if you look at an American paper, and this is back in the 1980s, and sadly enough even more so today, you really have to look hard to find something on Japan. It was often with a sense of sadness that the Japanese would wonder why we didn't report more on Japan. Now they never seemed too concerned that there was over-attentiveness or what we would call a substance gap or kind of a credibility gap. Why report on Congressman Irving Schwartz if he isn't important back here, if he isn't crucial to the dialogue or to the power structure or to the issue at hand. But they didn't see it that way. And I have to say probably some of them never saw it that way because they never were quite sure who was important back here. So that was a constant problem for us, trying to put their reportage of American things in proper perspective, in a proper balance that would bring credibility to what was really happening. It was a major challenge for the press officer and for the embassy and for the ambassador and any of us who were out talking to the Japanese.

Q: These programs that you had at the American Center, which ones do you think were really right fit, of being on target and did very well to a certain audience or subject or what have you?

BERRINGTON: Well, Stuart, in my opinion there was never any substitute for face to face contact, what in USIS you have probably heard us call the "last three feet." The idea that like we are right here talking to each other across the table rather than reading something in the newspaper, rather than reading a book, rather than seeing something on television. I am not belittling that. I am just saying in terms of importance, the idea of the face to face dialogue and face to face contact was really very important, and made much more of a difference in convincing somebody or persuading somebody about an issue than the more passive form of a book a or a newspaper. So those programs that fulfilled that function, that provided somebody for that "last three feet" were the ones that most of us thought were the most important, and by which I would say and I am not really in part order now. This is just what springs to mind. The IV program, the international visitor program, in which we would send people to the United States and go down and meet their counterparts and come back. The speaker or seminar program in which we would bring out specialists or experts of one kind or another to talk about issues. Whether it was talking with 20 people or in some cases maybe just with two or three people, those were the programs that really made I think the biggest dent.

For example, when I was at the Tokyo American Center, well, Yokohama which is the biggest city south of Tokyo, it is about a half hour south of Tokyo, a major city in its own right. It is a separate administrative district, not part of the Tokyo administrative district. The governor for that area was a well known socialist party figure, meaning he was somewhat critical of the United States. His deputy governor was a much younger socialist party politician who had been to North Korea, had been to China, had been to Russia, had been invited to all these places several times, but had never been to the United States. He was somebody that I got along with, but we would constantly have this ongoing kind of debate about the United States. He really didn't know that much about the U.S. Well, I figured this was a guy who was going to go further, and so I nominated him for an international visitor grant. He went to America. It was his very first time. He went all over, met with Democrats and Republicans, mayors, senators, congressmen. He even stayed on an Indian reservation in New Mexico. He made a home visit with a black family in Alabama. We really gave him the whole nine yards. He came back and I debriefed him. He spoke no English, like most Japanese politicians. So everything was done through interpreters on his trip to the U.S. But he said he had never had an experience like that in his life. That by comparison his visits to Russia, Korea, China of course, were much more like taking you to a Potemkin village. He didn't realize that at the time as he did now in comparing it with his American visits. He said it just made a total difference in his outlook on the United Sates. The way he put it, he said, "I have come back a changed man." I think it was people like him, and he is not the only one, but it was a combination of people like him in the socialist party which have really contributed to the eventual kind of implosion of the socialist party into, well there is no socialist party now. They have been so doctrinaire, so irrelevant that enough people like him said eventually to hell with this. We can't continue with a party like this. They have gone out and joined other parties or you know, totally left the Japan socialist party. So it was that kind of experience that taken together really contributed to a lot of change in Japan.

I can also remember when I had Ed Koch, the mayor of New York, in for a seminar. We had a bunch of young city council people from Tokyo, young politicians. They just came away from that meeting absolutely, you could see they were all just so whipped up with enthusiasm in how they are going to go back to their jobs and really make a lot of changes and do this and do that. Not that New York was the model but just simply Koch's style and what he was trying to do in New York was seen as something that the Japanese should try to emulate. Without those face to face experiences, I don't think that anything like that would have ever developed.

There was another example, of Zushi was a small town south of Yokohama where there was an American, well it was very close to Yokosuka, where we had a naval base Zushi was where a lot of the personnel from the Yokosuka naval base were housed. The mayor of Zushi was an astronomer who had somehow gotten into politics. He was a good friend of a friend of mine who was a labor leader. This whole issue of housing the American naval forces in Zushi became a fairly bitter issue. The local folks didn't want this housing

development. Zushi, the local administration didn't want it. The mayor of course was sort of leading the charge on all of this. He even refused to see anyone from the embassy. He just wouldn't have anything to do with the ambassador or the political section. He didn't want to be seen as you know, sashaying with the enemy. So, the embassy, because this was in my territory because I was down there a lot, and because he was a friend of a friend, this was turned into the friend invited the mayor and me out to lunch. We talked about a few things, and one thing led to another, and I literally became kind of like an emissary. I would meet with him. I would talk about certain things. I would ask him questions. Then I would go back to the political section and report on what had happened, and the political section would say oh this is good or this is not so good, now what about this. Then I would go back and talk to the mayor. I felt like the Henry Kissinger of Middle Eastern shuttle diplomacy. This would not have been possible if we had not had an American Center because the American Center was physically removed from the embassy. Everybody knew it was part of the embassy. I had an embassy title, but simply because it was physically removed, and because it was in the Japanese eyes seen as a cultural program rather than a political or economic program, I could get away with this. Eventually over time, I was able to back off, and the embassy people and the mayor would get together and everything was fine. But again I think it was those "last three feet" that made a difference. If it hadn't been for first of all the American Center's removed or distance, and also if it hadn't been for the fact that I had the friend who was the labor leader, we probably couldn't have gotten very far.

Q: You left there in '86, is that right?

BERRINGTON: Yes, I came back to Washington to become the director of junior officers training at USIA. In those days we still had a fairly active program to bring in new officers. I did that for about two years. This involved, the new officers had already been selected. I had nothing to do with recruiting or selection. That was another office. Once they reported to work on that first day, then they were my charges for the next 90 days or whatever it was that we had training for them, until they got their first assignment and would then move on to FSI for other area studies or language studies or whatever they needed to prepare for that first assignment. That was a marvelous job.

I had a great time doing that for a number of reasons. One, it gave me a chance to see the new officers. I have to say I have kept up over the years with many of them and have watched them succeed and develop into quite often successful officers.

Secondly, it gave me a chance to learn more about other offices of USIA that I never had any contact with because in training the new officers, we also had to familiarize them with USIA as an agency. So part of the program involved bringing in representatives from all these various offices to talk to the group about what they were doing, about what this office or that office did.

Thirdly, it gave me a chance to bring in outsiders. The program was pretty much whatever I wanted it to be. I mean I had nobody looking over my shoulder telling me to do this or

do that. So, we did things like, I thought it was very important for them to learn how to deal with the media. So I recruited a guy who did what we called media training where they actually got in front of a television camera and acted as though they were delivering some sort of statement about this or that, and then would look at their own videos. We had a fairly long session about public speaking. I mean you had the kids who thought they were already fairly good at this, but they found they weren't so good when we had some of the public speaking training. There were sessions on various foreign policy issues. I would bring in experts on American social and cultural issues so that they would know something about what was happening in say the women's rights issue or what was happening in theater and dance or what was happening in business affairs. It covered the waterfront.

So for all those reasons, both the outsiders and the insiders, for me it was a good opportunity to meet lots of people and shape, mold the program that would produce the kind of officers that I thought was important. Now this gives me a bit of a chance to say something you may disagree with, but in our training we did a lot with State. I had a counter part that was in charge of State's junior officer training as well. It didn't take too long to figure out that there were some basic differences in style and attitude, and not just about the training but careers and values. Quite frankly I tried to instill in these kids a not so much a sense of loyalty to the organization. I wasn't trying to turn out people who were just kind of automatically salute and say, "Yes sir." But kids that had the self confidence and the it is almost like an old Peace Corps sense, an ability to deal with the culture. I don't say just culture, but the ability to deal with foreign cultures in a way that they contribute to the dialogue between the two countries. I had a lot of disagreements with my State counterparts because the State people were at that time much more concerned about that loyalty to the institution and the formality of the relationship and how you had to do it this way or else. That was not what I was doing with our group. There were always periods where we would bring the State and USIS units together. It was striking the differences between the two.

Q: Were you up front with your group as you are doing this that you saw two different approaches? That they have got to understand the culture of the world you are going to be in and to understand that.

BERRINGTON: Yes. I mean first of all, I tried to point out look there is a different culture in the State Department than there is in USIA, and you have to realize what that culture is in order to deal with it. This was not meant to belittle or demean, just to make them aware of what the differences were. In some cases I didn't have to do this at all. I mean in some cases the kids picked it up like that because of the sessions we would have together. In other cases I had to explain, because it was very important. The State Department was like the mother hen. They had to realize that State runs the embassies and USIA is just a part of it. But as long as you know there are these differences, then fine. But also I think I was trying to instill in them as sense of respect and worth in the foreign cultures as well. That to be a successful USIS officer, you have to be curious. You have to be adventurous. You have to be good at languages. You have to be willing to be a

little bit more candid and honest about things to win the credibility of your foreign audience. You can't just sit in the office all day long and dash out memos. You have to be out dealing with people. Some of the people that came to us were uncomfortable with that. But again it was important for them to know, not just the policy issues but the way in which you got the policy issues across in the most persuasive manner with the foreign audience.

Q: Well, understanding the working culture is crucial to having a successful career. For example, one of the things I tried get junior officers to understand was that you are seldom ordered to do something. In the foreign service culture, there are suggestions. But they should be treated as orders; you can clarify them, but you are expected to complete this task. And if it is not done, you are not immediately reprimanded, but note is mentally taken, and you have lost points.

BERRINGTON: Yes, and I also, I mean I would agree with you completely. I also had to make it perfectly clear in spite of all the things I had just said about, you know, adapting yourself to USIS culture and learning more about it and being exploratory and inquisitive and all of that. You also have to realize that when push comes to shove, you are representing the U.S. Government. This is not the Peace Corps. In spite of the Peace Corps values I was pushing. It is not the Peace Corps, and you are also a member of a bureaucracy in which you have to stand up and sometimes argue on behalf of issues or positions that you personally may disagree with. If you have a problem with being a spokesman on an issue that you do not agree with, then you are in the wrong business.

Q: What was your impression of these new officers?

BERRINGTON: A mixed bag. It always is. There was one other person who was the career counselor. I was the trainer; she was the career counselor. Between the two of us, we kind of handled the group. She and I would often after a day of dealing with the kids would say, oh you know, Mary Smith, boy she is never going to make it through the training program and if she does, she is not going to last very long in the foreign service. Whereas, Oh John Brown, he is terrific. He, out of this class he is the most likely to succeed. We would often figure out things like that pretty quickly. And indeed some of them didn't make it through training. I think things were a lot different in the mid 1980s than they were when people like you and I came in. First of all, the class members were a lot older. We had a one member who was Oh gosh, 50 something.. Even if he made it through the training and the JOT (Junior Officer Training) assignment, you know they follow the assignment after the training in Washington as one JOT assignment overseas. Then you are expected to go on to your regular assignment. If he made it through training and the JOT assignment, all he would have time for would be one assignment before retirement age. Now quite frankly between you and me, I think that is sort of the wrong policy.

Q: This is sort of dictated by law.

BERRINGTON: This is the Claude Pepper legacy of ageism and all that sort of thing. [Editor's Note: Pepper was a Democrat Party politician from Florida who served in the U.S. Senate from 1936 to 1951 and in the House of Representatives from January 1963 until his death on May 30, 1989. He was known as a strong supporter of senior citizen issues.] I for one, I am all in favor of providing older people with the opportunity. But when you invest as much money and time in training and getting somebody started like that, if all they can do is just one assignment, then it strikes me as being a bad investment. This one individual was probably an extreme case, but there were older people like that in the classes which made the classes different from when you and I came. I remember I was the oldest person in my class when I came in. I mean I was way old, something like 27!

I mean you know after 30 years or so of service you see how that has changed. So there was that difference. Also, the kids that came in today don't have quite the career intentions that I think you and I had. I mean with us, we came into the foreign service, and we were probably, unless something really awful or extraordinary happened, we were going to stay. The kids then in the late 1980s and even more so today were starting to think of the foreign service as only one possible option, maybe for five or ten years and go on to something else. So they didn't have quite the long term view of their tenure as we probably did. But in terms of quality, there were extraordinarily capable and good people in these classes.

Q: By this time there was such an emphasis on having a woman, having minorities and all of that. Did you find that the recruitment side of the house was straining in order to get particular minorities enrolled?

BERRINGTON: I don't think so. There were a large number of minorities and women in every class. Again, I didn't see any drop-off in quality because they were women or minorities. In fact, I would probably go so far as to say if I had to pick the top five people out of a class of say 20 people, easily at least two or three of those top five were women or minorities. I think they were probably good and would do quite well.

What was interesting though was the process of picking up the institutional culture. You know, I was sure there was a big difference between my counterparts at State and me the way we approached the issue of dress. For example, with my group, I said, you know they all start off the first day with their suits and their ties. I said, "Look, for the rest of the session except for very obvious events, you don't have to wear a coat and tie." You know, I don't care what you look like. That is not my business to worry about. I want you to learn. I don't want you to be dressed like you are in a fashion show. At State of course, they had to wear suits. I don't know what it is like today, but in that era, State people weren't even allowed to wear sport coats. They had to wear suits.

Q: It has changed.

BERRINGTON: I thought that was silly. Another thing, they took attendance at State which I thought was funny. With my group, I didn't take attendance. If somebody didn't

show up, I knew it because I knew he wasn't there, but there was no need to act like it was a kindergarten and take attendance. Even before such institutional bias was put into effect, the State recruits were clearly different. There were more lawyers, there were more accountants. There were more kind of professional people. Whereas the USIS kids were clearly more ex-artists or journalists or kind of failed academics or a little bit more kind of the goofy eccentrics. and much more relaxed. Interesting, I always thought the USIS kids were more comfortable with themselves. The State kids seemed to be much more up tight, am I going to make it through this training program.

Q: Well, did you find there was any sort of residue of the 1960s. In other words, why are we doing this? Why shouldn't we be doing this?

BERRINGTON: Oh, absolutely. Oh, sure. I got a lot from my kids because I had a policy by which every couple of weeks they did evaluations. They would sit, and not just written evaluations, but I would leave the room, and one of the others would come in and say, "Now how are things going so far? What do you like about the training? What do you not like about the training? What would you have changed? What could have been done differently?" I don't think there was anything like that at State until the very end. I mean at the end of the program they had some sort of. So, yes, I had constant feedback, some of which I liked, some of which I didn't like. But you know, these are new recruits.

Q: Were there any sort of American foreign policy issues, say Central America for example? Were there any burning issues in the minds of the new recruits?

BERRINGTON: Not like it was at the height of the Salvadoran issue. No, I don't recall any Vietnam like problem. But that did not stop me though from talking about Vietnam as a case study of what you had to do and what you could not do in terms of speaking your own mind or dealing with your own concepts. There were sometimes challenges to those concepts. Why did we have to do it this way or why do we have to worry about my personal views as opposed to the official view. Can't I at least do it this way or that way? Yes, there were lots of challenges to see how far they could push things. I don't recall that it had ever been based so much on specific regional or bilateral concerns like a Vietnam. I don't think there was anything going on at that time that would have them that excited.

There was also one incident which really stands out in my memory. I am sure you remember. During training there was what we called an off-site. Well, State and USIA would get together about once a week or once every other week anyway for various activities. Then there was the off site where we went off to some place up in Maryland or West Virginia and would spend two or three days with all sorts of exercises and simulations. At the very end of this off-site there was the talent night where each group, each class puts on some kind of talent show. The USIA kids usually, this is very interesting, usually would put together some kind of skit which was always very satirical and very pointed about certain policy issues. Now this may in fact get back to something you asked about a few minutes ago. But I can remember one time, for example, this was

during the time the Reagan Administration was struggling with its guns for hostages policy was came out in the Iran-Contra affair.

Now the kids didn't particularly have any ethical or morality or philosophical differences concerning, I mean some of them may have felt strongly about it, but it wasn't a major concern for most. But they were aware of it, so when they had to do their skit, they did a skit which was based on what is the television game show “Let’s Make A Deal.” They had people from the class pretending to be the contestants in this show, and they were doing things like, "And now what's behind this door? It is an American hostage! How many guns to you want to trade for this American hostage?" I mean it was very cleverly done. Well, I was involved in it. They first said, “Do you think it is okay if we do it?” I said "Of course. Do whatever you want to." The State kids were absolutely horrified. That is all I can say. I mean they were shocked to see the USIA kids making this light and you know, satirizing something that was such a recent policy embarrassment. But afterwards, some of the State kids came up and said, "Wow, you guys are just amazing. You are so brave to do that. Nobody in our group would ever think of doing that sort of thing." I thought this shows the differences. I think largely because many of the State kids were lawyers or accountants or weren’t use to such creativity.

Stuart, I think that people like you and me who applaud this creative freedom, may not be on the cutting edge any longer. I mean even USIS has changed. There has been a change even from what I have described here, so those kinds of people are changing. So I did that for two years. It was great fun. I have always considered that one of my best assignments. Then after that for a year I did the Japan desk job at USIA. That was '88-'89. I think the one issue that came up then which I will never forget was the June 1989 Tiananmen Square incident in Beijing. I can remember watching that on TV in the office.

Q: Did Tiananmen affect our relations with the Japanese? I mean did it appear from embassy reporting that the Japanese had the same reaction that we had or were they a little more in a way sophisticated?

BERRINGTON: I think deep down inside the Japanese were horrified at the loss of life. I mean the Japanese would do anything to avoid confrontation and that kind of supreme confrontation was seen as madness, especially because students were involved. And I think the Japanese were horrified.

Clearly to the Japanese it was a break down of social order. Officially they don't like to offend China. You have got to keep in mind there is a huge Japanese business investment there, a lot of trade with China. They really bend over backwards to accommodate the Chinese in so many things. Tiananmen was a big embarrassment to the Japanese in that respect, so there was backpedaling and some kind of silence in some areas to avoid any further difficulties. Unofficially of course, it was just about the worst thing you could imagine. It didn't poison the well for them as it did for us, but it certainly was a problem in their relations.

Q: In the course of this program many USIA people I interviewed would characterize an assignment such as training junior officers, or running a Center as substantive, but being a desk officer, where there is no policy input, as not very interesting.

BERRINGTON: That was why I said the JOT job was one of the best I ever had. The Japan desk job was probably, I won't say one of the worst. It wasn't a bad job, but it was probably one of the easiest, and probably one of the more boring. I mean there just wasn't that much to really keep you engaged. Basically you are just pushing papers and attending meetings. You are more like a coordinator than an action person. You sort of put things together and make sure everybody is informed. The Japan desk officer, I should add, covers both Japan and Korea. This was at a time when there were some problems in Korea regarding some of our Centers. There, of course, had been problems in South Korea with some massacres there too, a few years before in southwestern Korea. There were lingering effects from those May 1980 demonstrations in Kwangju; more extremist elements in South Korea thinking that the United States had some involvement in the decisions to shoot the students and civilians. If not involvement, at least we tacitly went along with it so we were seen as culpable in many eyes in Korea as well. When we wanted to build some new centers or relocate some centers, there were always problems, and very niggling detail difficult problems which were not for me to deal with. They were being dealt with by people on the scene in Korea. Nevertheless, in my role as paper pusher or coordinator, back at the bureaucracy in Washington, in that year on the Japan-Korea desk, I would say my time was taken up 60% by Korea.

Q: Today is July 5, 2000. Robin, your next assignment after the Japan/Korea Desk was Japan, right?

BERRINGTON: Back to Japan. Sayonara was not part of my vocabulary. I was there from the summer of 1989 to the summer of 1993.

Q: So a good four year tour. What were you doing there?

BERRINGTON: Well, I was the Cultural Attaché, what they called the senior CAO. USIA had a number of so-called senior CAO positions around the world. One was Japan, one was Germany, One was India. I think maybe Mexico might have had one as well. I think they were the four posts where the cultural program was large, well funded, had branch posts, almost all the basic USIS activities in play, so the American staff was large enough that they would make CAO a senior CAO and I had both a deputy CAO as well as assistant CAO. Not may places had that array of titles and officers. Frankly speaking it was just title inflation as far as I was concerned. But nevertheless, that is what I was. I should add that I was fully surprised to be back in Japan. I never expected to be there again because when I looked at the staffing profiles, the way things were, the incumbent CAO in Japan, the job that I would have been most likely a candidate for and the one I was most interested in, was supposed to be in place for a number of years yet. The job would not be open when I was available. Anyway, what eventually happened is that he decided he didn't like Japan. He decided it was time to retire, and after two years in

Tokyo, he surprised everybody by upping and retiring right then and there which then opened the CAO position unexpectedly. That's how I got there.

Q: Who was the ambassador? I guess you had two didn't you?

BERRINGTON: Well, in the last months while I was on the Desk, we were kind of in between ambassadors. Mile Mansfield had left Tokyo in December 1988 and Mike Armacost arrived in May 1989. In effect by the time I got there and by the time I got into play, Armacost was the Ambassador. He was in effect the chief of mission for the whole time I was there.

Q: You arrived in 1989. This, of course was the year of destiny. The whole Soviet Union fell apart. Were you seeing a change in what we were after in Japan during this period beginning to move out of the cold war?

BERRINGTON: Well, not really. As I may have said before, cold war determinations did not affect our activities in Japan quite as much as I think they must have in other countries. The one item that had a clear cold war impact was, of course, the security treaty, the U.S.-Japan security treaty. Because that, in a way, kept the Japanese from rearming. You would have thought that the Chinese would have been opposed to any kind of security treaty between the U.S. and Japan, and of course they were years before. At this point the Chinese actually came to see it as kind of a good thing, in a way sort of keeping the cap on the bottle of Japanese militarism, or cork in the bottle I should say. Of course the Koreans were very happy with it. When I say the Koreans I mean the South Koreans, because we had our own treaty with the South Koreans, but also because it just added to the security of East Asia as a whole. You know, for much of that time the most potential flashpoint has always been the border between North Korea and South Korea. Even the Chinese, who maybe felt comfortable talking about Taiwan or whatever, didn't really present that much of a real danger. So it was really more the Korean problem we had to worry about. The cold war really took on more of a regional coloration, and the real enemy there was more likely to be North Korea than anybody else. The Russian element in cold war politics in other parts of the world didn't play as big a role, I think, in what we were doing in Japan. So the whole collapse of the Soviet Union, all of that didn't really change our basic mission that much. Again the trade issue was predominant and always has been, probably always will be. The trade issue was so strong. The security treaty, and then other areas of cooperation between the Japanese and us in say environment or technology. Energy sources were of course always an ongoing concern. That wasn't a real issue that divided us; it was one where we tended to agree.

Q: Of the issues at the time I can think of, were you engaged, as cultural affairs officer, in activities relating to the Gulf War and the rallying around. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait had an effect on Japan of course because of its dependence on the Persian Gulf oil.

BERRINGTON: Yes we were engaged; we were involved, but it was more in the - I guess you would say - in the opinion forming process than anything else. You know, we

would bring out, the cultural section would organize and bring out speakers to talk about this. We would provide materials from our libraries, which incidentally at that point were starting to be called information and resource centers rather than libraries. The word library over the years kind of became a dirty word. It reeked of old fashioned and a lot of people back in Congress couldn't understand why we needed public libraries in countries around the world like Japan,. They would argue we don't have enough libraries in our own country. I mean that is confusing the issue, as though libraries in South Carolina are dipping into the same pile of funds as libraries in Japan that the embassy supports. But anyway we would provide materials from our information resource centers.

You have to recall at that time the Japan program had access to electronic data. Our computerized programs were very much state of the art for its day. If a newspaper man who was covering something about the Gulf War, he could get into one of our information resource centers, talk to one of the staff. She could put him to a computer or get the material herself. In any case we were in a position to provide these kinds of materials almost instantaneously and very completely, and in much greater detail than we could have before the onset of the computer and all of that was provided there. So yes I guess that is kind of a roundabout way to answer that but yes we were in the whole business of shaping opinion and informing key audiences, members of the audience, yes we were engaged in things like the Gulf War.

Q: This is your third tour in Japan. Had you noticed an evolution in I won't say Japan itself, but I how opinion and how opinions were working. You are trying to inform and influence and all. I was wondering whether you were seeing a change through the eyes of a new generation, more people willing to get away from the lockstep of Japanese society?

BERRINGTON: Let's see my first tour was 1969-1975. The second was 1981-1986, and third, yes this is the third time in Japan. Over these tours I would say there were some very definite changes. I mean this was the time when I think all this change was becoming much more evident. First and foremost was the role of women. The opportunities for women had been gradually increasing over the years, but really at a snail's pace. In the 1990s it started to really open up. A number of reasons for this. One was the violence of the so-called bubble economy, when there was just lots of money around, lots of job opportunities around. The Japanese population, if you ever go to Japan, it is an extraordinarily crowded and jammed group of islands, but in fact it is a fast aging society so the number of people available for jobs particularly in that time when jobs were increasing by leaps and bounds was not that great. There weren't that many young people around, so that sector of the population that normally would just go to school, graduate, get married and stay at home and tend the kids and clean the house suddenly were right out there in the job market. The whole business of birth control changed as well. Women were now not having babies as quickly. I mean, if it all sounds similar to the changes here in the States, it was. It may be 10 or 20 years later in Japan, but the whole business of what women could do was moving down the same track, at a slower pace but...

Q: But you know, you've seen these changes in a society, and were we trying to reach women's groups? Were things changing for you target audience?

BERRINGTON: Oh yes, well more and more organizations like the sort of Japanese equivalent to the National Organization of Women or whatever. There were groups like that out there. And if they were of a national level of impact, and if they were concerned with issues that we were concerned with, then we would try to work with them, or we would invite them to activities or include them in events that were going on. They would become a part of our target audience.

We found out it is a very curious question. We found that many of the kinds of public action groups or community organizations like say consumer groups in the United States. Consumer groups in the U.S. of course, worked for lower prices and for greater availability of goods and higher standards and you know environmental protection and whatnot. In Japan, organizations like consumer groups weren't necessarily working toward the same goals. It is a strange thing about Japanese society, but many of those kinds of pressure groups or lobbying groups had such strong ties to the government already that they were almost part of the government apparatus, so that in a trade issue where our argument was bring in the U.S. good. We argued it will create more competition and lower the prices, which seemed to be an automatic argument for any self respecting consumer organization. No, it didn't fly that way in Japan. The consumer groups there would argue, why do we want American foodstuffs. American foodstuffs would come in and put the Japanese farmers out of business. In other words they were just mouthing the Japanese government line. It was very frustrating for us because we couldn't understand how consumer groups with any self respect could in effect simply parrot what had become a version of the government line. But in Japan, most pressure organizations had to have that kind of political connection to be effective. The idea of being a gadfly or a Ralph Nader type troublemaker would just not a role model for the Japanese. The just didn't see that kind of function doing any good for society. So we did not work as much with some of these organizations that on the surface you would have thought oh the embassy must be working with X and Y, because they were just not that useful a group to go with.

Q: You talked before about bringing in speakers on program themes that had become sort of automatic. How did you find it when you came back this time?

BERRINGTON: Well, as I had said before, a lot of those changes had become fairly well institutionalized, and they had their ups and downs. By the time I got there in 1989, it struck me as being another one of those down periods. But 1989 was an interesting time for the embassy. I am sure nobody really gets any credit for doing this on purpose, but it was as if all the old gang came back. And by that I mean people like Mike Armacost, the ambassador, who had been in Japan as a special assistant with Ambassador Ingersoll years ago when many of us were there during the Carter period that I mentioned earlier. The DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) was a guy named William Breer who was also very familiar with the USIS program and what we were doing. He had been a political

counselor in previous years and now he was back as the DCM. Rust Deming was now Political Counselor. Then there were people within USIS who it was now time for them to come back. It just was a very kind of unified and compatible group that was there at that time. The PAO was Rob Nevitt who had been with me in Thailand actually years ago in the late 60's. Although this was his first time in Japan, he understood the value of having a well organized and well thought through and very carefully targeted program. So he had no problems with any of that. Many of the center directors and many of my colleagues in the press office or even within the cultural office they were in agreement as well. So, in effect even though it was a little bit rocky when we all started coming back in the summer of 1989, I would say by the end of the year we had formed a fairly well knit and good program. We all sort of knew how each other could work and it was quite comfortable, the situation.

Q: How did you find by this time ties between American academic institutions and Japanese institutions? Were there strong ties?

BERRINGTON: Not really. There were some sister school type relationships. It didn't work very easily for several reasons. First of all was language. If an American student or American teacher goes to Japan, to be really effective at the university there, he or she has to have Japanese. The classes in Japan are not run in English, they are run in Japanese. How many professors or students in the U.S. are comfortable with the language to be able to do that? The same thing applies in reverse. If a Japanese student or professor is going to go for a year to the sister school or whatever, they have to have good English. Obviously the English level of most Japanese is far better than the Japanese level of most Americans. Even still the English level of too many Japanese, and I am sad to say this is particularly true of the academic community, is insufficient to the task I think academics tend to be less outgoing and have that kind of extroverted personality that you really need to develop a language well, to learn a language well. In any case few academics in Japan had the English ability to survive as a student or a teacher in the U.S. Even though many schools in America and in Japan wanted that kind of relationship, the Americans wanted it because again this is the bubble economy and Japan is rich, money, money. You will remember also at the same time when Japanese businesses were seen as absolute successes. They had the most brilliant management ideas. Things like theory X and all of that where all these books being written. Japan was the hot number of the early 1990s. Everybody wanted to find out what the secret of Japanese success was. So sure there was a lot of interest, but the language was a pretty big barrier for a lot of people.

Secondly, Japanese universities were run by the ministry of education. The ministry of education in Japan has to be one of the most feudalistic, backward, hardened, hard-edged, I mean just a very stubborn bureaucracy which does not like new ideas or change. They found the arrangement running the big state schools, universities of Tokyo or Kyoto, all the best schools, they found it all very comfortable, why should they change? It was working for them. So any type of school agreement, any kind of exchange program that might be set up would have to have the minister of education's stamp of approval. Getting that was sometimes a big problem.

A third problem, again going back to the bubble economy, Japan in those days as you may know from your own experience because you had passed through Japan at that time was extraordinarily expensive place. This was the era of the ten dollar cup of coffee and all the horror stories you hear. Now it was expensive because you were converting from dollars to yen, not necessarily expensive if you had yen to begin with. Nevertheless, that meant a lot of Americans simply wrote Japan off their list. They might have been interested. They would love to go pick up on this or that management program, but they just didn't have the money to spend at that time. So for all those reasons there was not much exchange going on between Japan and the U.S..

Q: Within your circle of Americans and Japanese, were there Cassandras saying look at this economy. It's a bubble economy based on real estate values and there are real problems or was the atmosphere in the embassy and also in your Japanese's social group this is the way it is going to be.

BERRINGTON: There may have been a few. Unfortunately those that said those things had kind of blotted their notebook with rather anti-or statements critical of Japan that kind of reeked of slightly racist or that evoked memories back to WWII or whatever. Many of the criticisms of Japan that might have been Cassandra like would be somewhat compromised by the known political standing or attitudes of the person that was saying this. It made his or her comments far less credible. I am afraid most of us were pretty guilty of just being sucked up by the enthusiasm of the times.

Yes, a lot of us had lived and worked in Japan knew there were problems, knew that these kinds of inflated prices, property could not go on forever. I mean it was called a bubble economy during that time. We all know what happens to a bubble economy, it bursts. That is the nature of the beast, so we knew it was going to happen sometime. Just when of course, nobody knew. But until that happened, there were a lot of people willing to go out there and join in the party and rake in the money and take advantage of all the opportunity that was there. It is hard to criticize people for not being a little bit more realistic about the weaknesses of the system at that point.

Q: Well, during this time what were your projects that may have been different from other times?

BERRINGTON: One of the big issues for us in the cultural office and in fact it connected with what you were asking earlier. This is what we called the branch campus problem in Japan. What this was because of the reasons I have just explained why there were no sister school relationships or very few, and because of the expense and whatnot. Many American schools wanted, they wanted those Japanese students to come to their campus in Kansas or Texas or New Hampshire or whatever. But that wasn't going to happen. So if they couldn't get the kids to come to the U.S., what they did was to take the mountain to Mohammed so to speak and they would set up a branch campus, Smith University or Johnson College, you know I am just making names up now. They would set up a branch

campus in Japan. The idea was the Japanese students could enroll at this American branch campus, study English, study other kinds of programs, get a degree from this school, and then while staying in Japan, and then move on into employment or whatever. This kind of arrangement was set up usually with the cooperation of local authorities in a city or prefecture or local politicians or local businesses. It was usually seen as a money making machine. Its academic credibility, its academic credentials quickly became suspect. The ministry of education was always very suspicious of this because they didn't like the idea of all these foreigners coming in and setting up branch campuses all over the country. The quality of teachers that were hired to teach at these places sometimes were brought over from the U.S. but often were hired locally. They didn't get great teachers. Some of these schools promised more in the way of programs and degrees than they were prepared to follow through and provide. Well, after about a year or two of all of these schools coming in to set up these campuses, things started to get rather nasty with the ministry of education, parents of students, local authorities and others getting more and more upset with this kind of an arrangement. Lawsuits, threats, started causing political problems. It became quite unpleasant. As a result the embassy was drawn into this because many of the Japanese parents or people from the ministry of education wanted the embassy's input trying to control or bring some stability to what was a very bad situation. So we were very much involved with that problem. That was probably one of the main things that marked the four years I was there. In fact my deputy cultural affairs officer, that was one of the main things he handled, that and nothing but that.

Q: Were we trying to dampen this thing, because it was giving us a bad name.

BERRINGTON: Oh yes. It gave American education a bad name. It gave the schools that came over a bad name. It was just a losing proposition for everybody. The only ones that gained from this were usually the local Japanese businessmen or others who had, because the ministry of education insisted on local control, wanted these Japanese businessmen or politicians to sign on as presidents or members of the board. These guys usually gained financially from this. No problem for them, they were getting money, so if the school didn't do a good job, they didn't care. They were just kind of guys behind the scenes. Often they were, members of the board were not even known to the public at large. Yes, we wanted to put a stop to this kind of academic and financial hanky-panky simply because it was giving a bad reputation to American education and the United States in general.

Q: What issues seemed to come to the fore? How about movies and all just doing their things. It was a business that had been going on for years.

BERRINGTON: Yes, very much so. There was no change there. In fact the 1989-'93 period was largely, because of all the money that was in play, was not a terribly crisis ridden period, except for the continuing trade issues. Even they I don't think seemed quite as bad at times. I mean I can recall you had people like member of congress Helen Bentley [Republican Party], I believe, from Baltimore. She took a sledge hammer to a Japanese car in front of the capitol building one day. It was all a photo opportunity. She

didn't just see a car. They had brought in a Japanese car and then the Congressmen all bashed on it with sledge hammers. [Editor's Note: In 1987, Bentley organized a public relations stunt in which she and several GOP colleagues used sledgehammers to destroy a Japanese-made radio on the Capitol steps.] That caused a bit of a ruckus in Japan.

No the relationships between the two governments were quite good, quite compatible. The exchange of information, there were even the start of some programs where you were exchanging members of the bureaucracy, members of a Japanese agency might go to the U.S. for six months and work alongside their American counterparts. Then vice versa, members of the U.S. bureaucracy would go to Japan and do the same thing. It was evidence I think of the closeness of the two governments, bureaucracies and how smoothly that it worked.

Q: Were we concerned at the time in Japan's growing prosperity Japan and Japanese entities buying Rockefeller Center and all that and the American reaction of Japanese bashing in the United States?

BERRINGTON: Yes, that was always a constant undercurrent. It was frankly because of one basic thing and that is, I am sorry to say, but there is a racist element in America, and Japanese are a different race. Memories of the war were still - most of the veterans were old men - but there were some memories of WWII. You certainly didn't look at the amount of investment in the United States from Holland, Canada, Germany and the UK all of which were still higher than Japan at that point. Yet there was not Dutch bashing or Deutsch bashing or anything like that, but they were behaving this way toward the Japanese. It was hard to not regard it as a form of racism.

Q: Is there anything we could do about this?

BERRINGTON: Well, no, because this was a problem back in the U.S. of course. The embassy was in no position to have any kind of effect on things back home. I mean newspapers would write editorials or local politicians - a Congressman or a mayor or somebody - would make some inflammatory statements. There were even a few well known academics who would kind of like to wave the flag and engage in this kind of practice. No there wasn't anything we could do about it. If those people came through Tokyo as they occasionally did and wanted to meet with the embassy, of course we would meet with them, and we would try to reason with them and present what we thought was a more accurate realistic picture of what was going on. But a USIS program is not organized to deal back in the U.S. The embassy really had such small resources that we really can not affect the discussion like that back in the U.S.

But Japan was very concerned. The foreign ministry and the Japanese government was definitely upset at this. Constantly when you would go out and meet with, and it wasn't just the government officials. The Japanese people, as I mentioned before in the papers, there was what we called this significance gap where the papers would report on every single thing that happened in the United States that concerned Japan. Even if it were so

irrelevant or insignificant, you know if something happened in some small corner of North Dakota or a Congressman that nobody has heard of before or since says something. Who cares? But the Japanese would care . It would get reported in the papers, big headlines, pictures, stories. So the Japanese were definitely concerned because they wondered if things were just going kind of haywire vis-a-vis the U.S.-Japan relationship. You have to realize the Japanese look at the rest of the world as a source of so much that they need to survive. The energy they need to keep the country going, the cultural stimulation they need to keep society going, all of this comes from abroad. Their main partner, the Japanese are very concerned about the hierarchy of the world situation. In the Japanese eyes, their main partner, their main benefactor, their main ally was the U.S. So if they think something is happening in the U.S. that somehow we are slipping into an anti-Japanese way of thinking, they found this a concern. They were not happy with this. But the Japanese were sometimes their own worst enemy. For example, on American TV, let's say some American politician says something outrageous in the emotion at the moment, you would think that a member of the Japanese embassy or a well known Japanese of some international reputation could then get on American TV or in the U.S. newspapers and do an interview, do something that would show how the Japanese really think or their side of the argument or something that would be persuasive or credible. They had a very hard time doing that. They are just not comfortable speaking in public. They are not good on TV. Their English language ability was always a serious barrier for allowing them to communicate internationally. Several of us in the embassy used to just batter over and over again on the point why don't you train a group of whether it was government officials or scholars or journalists or anybody who can get out there and talk about these issues so that your side of the story is getting across to the public in the U.S.? It is not. You are literally leaving the whole discussion up to the Japan basher side. Why not engage these people; why not present your side of the issue? Over the years a few did emerge, a few Japanese that could do this. But they are not good at public affairs. The whole concept of what we had been doing in our work for years, public diplomacy, is just not a function it is not a value that they have. As a result they suffer from it. I mean the other problem, too, is, I mean if I were ask you to name the Japanese prime ministers since WWII, you would probably have a hard time to give more than about two or three names. Whereas if you were Japanese and I were to ask you to name the American presidents, you could rattle them off, bingo, bango. Or name famous Americans, they could do that. But could you name some famous Japanese personalities?

Q: This is tape seven side one with Robin Berrington. For famous personalities, how about Mr. Toyota, Mr. Honda, Mr. Sony. But aren't these made up brand names?

BERRINGTON: No, there really is a Mr. Toyota. There really is a Mr. Honda. If he was to walk into this room you wouldn't even know it. These are not well known. They are not recognized; they are not public personalities like American business leaders or political leaders. Even famous scholars in America like Henry Kissinger will develop into a public personality. That doesn't happen in Japan. {Editor's Note: sounds like] "Lord Ika," who is one of the most impressive people in the 20th. century in Japan, was very much castigated by his peers for being so well known, for having this kind of personality. Why? Because

he spoke English, because he was very dynamic and kind of liked to get out there and be in the spotlight. There is an old Japanese saying, if the nail sticks up, it gets pounded down. That is the problem with Japanese society. Any business, government or whatever, anyone who sticks up, who gets attention, society pounds them down. You don't have the kind of individual in Japan that can stand up and say, “That’s wrong,” or be a public speaker. In the States almost all of us have public speaking courses in high school or somewhere along the line. That never happens in Japan. It is just inconceivable in Japanese education. So it is just a totally different attitude about how you deal with each other, how you deal with the public, how you cultivate and nurture personality. As a result the Japanese are their own worst enemy.

Q: You’ve watched Japan over a period of years since 1969. Do you see a change? Because what you are describing is a national characteristic, but it is a national characteristic that is not a winner's characteristic in a competitive world.

BERRINGTON: Well, and you see what is happening now. After the bubble burst, Japan has really struggled to deal with it. The Japanese used to get very depressed when they would think about how many Nobel Prize winners they had compared with the other countries with similar GNP's or research institutions or level economy or whatever. The reason they don’t is because the idea of promoting innovation, inventiveness and all of this is just not part. It is difficult for me to say why, but it is just not part of again Japanese character. So when the bubble burst and the economy went into such a drastic slide, you know, it has been years and they still are not really sure if they are out of the woods. I remember just a couple of months ago there was something in the papers about how the last quartet it looked like things were finally turning around. But in the quarter after that, it was back into negative figures again. So they haven't come up with any good ideas on how to turn the economy around. There still are not that many well known Japanese personalities or figures that can stand up and excite public emotion. Having said all of that, yes it is changing. It is definitely changing. There are more and more women in business, in government. In the last election there were more women elected than ever before. You know, just a couple of weeks ago in the latest election. More and more companies are being started up, you know the Japans dot-com's have come along. So, yes, the change there is just a much more glacial change. The thing is it is getting better, and it is too bad the bubble economy had to burst when it did and it has taken so long for things to stabilize. I think most of us that have been involved with that country know that it is just a matter of time. They will probably be stronger for the experience. But they do have some definite negatives that they just have to deal with, one of which is the bureaucracy which is so overwhelming and so inflexible and rigid and just tends to dominate every aspect of society.

Q: Is there anything else we should talk about or should we move on? Were you there when President Bush visited?

BERRINGTON: Oh, yes. Well, as the cultural attaché, I was always in charge of the wife. On that particular visit, I was in charge of Mrs. Bush. She was terrific. We had a good

time. I remember she was interested in problems with old folks so we took her to an old people's home. She wanted to do some sightseeing and other things. It was a very nice schedule. He was there or 48 hours, two days. On the second day, President Bush was playing tennis with the emperor and the crown prince. Ambassador Mike Armacost was his partner. So it was Bush and Armacost versus the emperor and the crown prince. Mrs. Bush and I got back to the place where they were playing tennis just as the game was winding up. We all sat around and talked. The President looked tired. He had been suffering from a bad cold or something. The Japan stop (January 7-10) was the last in a series of visits that started in Australia on December 31, 1991 and went to Singapore (January 3-5, 1992), and Korea (January 5-7). They went back to the hotel, and at that point the only event for the rest of the day was the state dinner being hosted by the prime minister at his residence. As control officer for the President's wife, I accompany her the whole time she is on her separate schedule. But when she goes back to the President's party, in other words when she is traveling with the President to a state dinner or whatever, I, as her control officer, back off, because the President's control officer automatically takes her under their umbrella. So I was in effect finished for the rest of the day. It was very tiring as you know. I went home. I was watching the event on TV. This is like 7:30, 8:00 at night. I was watching it on TV when suddenly I saw something was not right. He slumped over. The cameras were way in the back of the room. You couldn't really see up close what was happening, but when everybody realized that the President had slumped over and fallen under the table, then everybody suddenly got very tense. The camera tried to zoom in. But within minutes the phone rang. It was controller of the president's visit. They said, "Robin, be prepared to get down here right away." I said, "Why?" They said, "Well, as you may know, the President has taken ill, and we need somebody to deal with the imperial family."

One of my other functions in the embassy was as the sort of main contact with the Japanese imperial family. This was partly a function of my job but also partly was based on something I had developed over the years by being in Japan so long. I had gotten to know a couple of members of the imperial family through their interest in the arts. One thing led to another. For example, the empress used to call me up if she had questions or she wanted a copy of a book or materials about the United States. She would just call up and say, "Mr. Berrington, can you get this to me?" I would. The emperor and the empress were very interested in music. We would provide music opportunities to them, for example, Orpheus, the chamber music group. When Orpheus came to Japan, I arranged for Orpheus to provide a private concert for the emperor and the empress and their family, because all the members of the imperial family play musical instruments. The idea was they would be able to play with Orpheus.

I was often invited to accompany the crown prince when he would go to maybe an opera or a ballet because they liked to have a foreigner or two with the official party, and because I could speak Japanese and I knew him, I was an easy pick. I would often be invited to their houses or palaces for dinner parties or cocktail parties. I wasn't a foreigner that was going to embarrass them or cause trouble, and being cultural attaché doesn't hurt either. So anyway when the President got sick, there was just immediate concern that the imperial family would get very concerned because the President and the ambassador had

been playing tennis with the emperor and the crown prince and would the emperor feel upset that maybe the President had overdone himself or they had not been good tennis players. Concerns like that. So they wanted me down there in case someone from the imperial palace showed up with flowers or just in case. So I said, "Sure, of course. I'll come down." As it turned out they quickly realized that all he had was stomach flu. As you know of course, he up chucked his dinner in the prime minister's lap. When they took him back to the hotel and had the doctor look at him, they knew exactly what the problem was. It turned out the emperor didn't show up or the crown prince didn't come and there was nothing like that, and I didn't have to do anything. But, it was quite a tumultuous evening.

Q: While we are on the subject, do you see an evolving role of the emperor, the crown prince, and the royal family or were they hemmed in by the court bureaucracy that sounds like something out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

BERRINGTON: Yes, yes, yes. They were hemmed in, and the bureaucracy was an extraordinary one. Everything I have said about Japanese bureaucracy, just multiply it by three or four times and you will have the imperial household agency. Probably the most hidebound, conservative, tradition oriented, inflexible, rigid bureaucracies in all of Japan. Because it is the emperor's bureaucracy, they feel that what they say goes. They don't have to worry about what others think. You know, we speak for the emperor. I can remember one time when Reagan...

Q: The emperor at this time was Akihito.

BERRINGTON: The emperor was Akihito. His father Hirohito did it the same way. But, Akihito, you have to remember, was tutored by an American Quaker. One (Elizabeth Gray) Mrs. Vining.

Q: She wrote Windows For the Crown Prince: Akihito of Japan.

BERRINGTON: Yes. So there has been…this was of course during the occupation after the war, and American influence there helped to raise Akihito, who was the Crown prince at that time, with an westernized outlook and slightly better exposure to the outside world. I mean he went to Gakushuin University which in the old days was a peer school, peer meaning nobility. The peer schools then after the war opened up to a lot more people. The current crown prince also went to Gakushuin but went to Oxford as well. This is the first time a member of the royal family or I should say an, crown prince level of the imperial family had been to university outside of Japan. Akihito, of course, married a commoner. The empress is not a member of one of the collateral imperial families of the old nobility. Her father was a flower maker. I don't mean flowers like in the garden but flour that makes bread. I mean he was a very wealthy, very well placed businessman. That marriage was something that just didn't happen. It was definitely arranged, and all the things that led to it were carefully orchestrated. So the family is changing, but the bureaucracy still calls the shots. But it is opening up, it is loosening quite a bit. I mean the

fact that of some of my closest friends who were nephews of the emperor, the fact that they could do some of the things that they did. I mean they weren't in the immediate line. You know it would take three or four deaths before they would ever get up there, but some of them went to school in Canada or Australia. Some of them married commoners. On down the line, so things are shaking up. But the imperial family is very much a reflection of Japan. They are a very reticent family. Everything is kept very close to the vest. None of them are very outspoken or individualistic in any way. They are all very careful in what they say. They are basically cake cutters and ship launchers. They preside over fundamentally ceremonial and other kinds of state functions like that. They don't have what you would call glamorous or exciting lives.

Q: Compared to what has been happening in the royal family in England, they are probably well off.

BERRINGTON: Well, the Japanese family is probably in much better shape. Most people tend to respect the Japanese family. They do not particularly want to be like them, but they tend to respect them, and they are not held in the kind of ridicule or disregard that the English are. It is a totally different family system.

Q: You left there in '93, and you went back to Washington. To do what?

BERRINGTON: From 1993 to 1995 I ran the program of Arts America. Arts America was the program that selected and sent abroad those visual and performing arts activities that were available to the embassy to present in their countries as the best, most representative American culture of the time. So it might be an art exhibit for a museum. It might be a symphony orchestra for a concert series. It might be a dance troupe. It might be a theater company. It might be a jazz pianist. It might be whatever, any of those kinds of things. It could be a writer, a specialist. We sent people to the Hermitage museum in Leningrad to deal with problems of preservation and restoration of some of the works that had just been neglected and were starting to fall apart from lack of attention. We sent the Philadelphia Orchestra to South America. We were responsible for all the international biennales like Venice and the American participation in things like that, or the Sao Paulo biennale, the Cairo biennale or Istanbul biennale. All of these big international art exhibits, we took care of the official American presentation in it. We sent the Edward Albee play Three Tall Women around the Middle East and south Asia. We sent the Dance Theater of Harlem to South Africa. I could just go on and on. This is a great legacy, very honorable.

Q: I would think nowhere else in cultural affairs would you have to have real strategic, advanced planning, because all these - maybe not the speakers not- but anything else, you just don't call up the Philadelphia Orchestra and send it off.

BERRINGTON: Advanced timing in this business was crucial. Well, first of all we didn't sponsor the Philadelphia Orchestra. We didn't have the budget. When we did have a big ensemble like them or a theater or dance company or Alvin Ailey, we sent him to Africa,

we usually had co sponsors. Or the posts receiving these things would often line up financial sponsorship so the costs would be lower. But because with these organizations advance planning is their lifeblood, we would often be talking to them and booking them three or four years in advance. So frequently if I had an idea let's do X or Y, I might not even see it to completion because I would have since moved to another job. But I was the Foreign Service director of the office. The staff in the office was composed primarily of civil service people who were there full time and many of them had been there ten years, twelve years and you know knew the office details much better than I did and had good contacts with people. One section would be for the visual arts and one would be for the performing arts, one would be for... Another function we did there is we would provide grants to American institutions like there is something that goes on in North Carolina every year called the American Dance Festival. We would give the grants to institutions like ADF, and then they would invite dancers, choreographers, dance presenters, whatever from all over the world to North Carolina using our funds among others to help pay for the administration of this. Then these people would come to North Carolina, spend a couple of weeks or a couple of months there, and then go back to their own country. It would often be up to the posts around the world to help choose the people that would go to something like that North Carolina event. That was usually one of the conditions of our giving money, that the embassy had the opportunity to help choose or be involved in the selection of whoever is coming from let's say from Turkey, or Peru or where ever it might be. So we had separate sections for each of these functions that we were doing in Arts America. I think it is safe to say that that program was always one of the most popular programs that we did in USIA because everybody likes having a musical troupe or a theater company or an art exhibit come through and provide a little bit of class or entertainment, so something above and beyond the more dreary details of consular work or treaty negotiations or trade disputes or whatever it was that embassies normally deal with. It was not a program without criticism though.

A lot of people within USIA just as much as the Department regarded it as fluff, regarded it as marginal, and felt that the so called heavy trade or policy issues were far more important than having the New York City Ballet pass through. I disputed this as did some of the others, but it was a continuing battle that we had. One of the points that I would always make is members of your target audience will certainly remember the last time the Philadelphia Orchestra came to town. I wonder if they remember the last time the Secretary of State came to town. I mean there are those kinds of events that have a higher profile, and they do a lot more for burnishing the American image abroad. It makes us a country with a civilized society and culture which in many countries in the world is an ongoing struggle to convince people that we are a country with culture or advanced or artistic achievement.

Q: I notice this was the beginning of the Clinton administration and the spirit of the times in Congress was cut, cut, cut government. I would have thought it was a very lean time for you all.

BERRINGTON: It was. Our budget was not huge. Our budget was only about three to four million dollars. In fact, one of the things I did was out fund raising from other organizations, businesses, foundations, to help share the cost on, sometimes with success, sometimes very frustrating. But this is how I learned the meaning of the word leveraging. The idea was that if we stick say $100,000 into a project, maybe we can leverage a million dollars out of somebody else. The Office of Arts America had one of the best leveraging records in USIA. Yes, budgets were being cut, and we needed to look for funds from elsewhere. If we were going to survive, we had to do a lot of that. But the fact that we were successful in doing it showed that it could be done. But that in a way was a two edged sword because in the two years that I was there, the USIA leadership became more and more unhappy with an arts program in the USIA brochure. So you quite remember, this was the time when many people in Congress were after the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for Humanities, and the arts were becoming more and more criticized in congress. Congressmen would complain why is USIA spending money on the arts when they should be spending it on something else. I am sorry to say our leadership at USIA just totally caved in. They did not stand up for it.

I don't think they really ever understood what USIA was about. Well, first of all, the leadership in USIA Joe Duffy. Joe had been president of American University, had been chairman of the National Endowment of the Humanities under the Carter administration, had political ties of his own, and had a very good reputation. When he was made director of USIA, we thought that was a pretty good thing. But it turned out Duffy and his fellow political appointees never did really understand much of what USIA was about. They probably traveled the least overseas of any of the USIA administration over the years. As a result they probably understood less about what the Foreign Service was all about. I mean I can remember times when Duffy would talk to Congressional staff in front of the career people like myself and other office directors and Duffy would say things like foreign service officers are paid too much or USIA projects really don't need as much in this field because there are more pressing issues out there for the United States and other areas of concern. Well, you just don't do that kind of thing. It was a total abdication of his responsibility. As director of the agency to be saying things like that to people who were looking for ways to cut our budget.

Q: One gets the feeling that the Clinton administration which is in its last months now, certainly at the beginning was not very tuned toward foreign policy. Christopher was more a lawyer trying to deal with the problems at hand and not looking forward.

BERRINGTON: That is certainly true. I mean they tolerated us, you know, they went through the motions of saying how important we were and how important our programs were and how they were going to do everything they could to protect and preserve, but it was a que sera, sera, and their record is not a good one. As a result our budget started being cut more and more. As a result at the end of two years, they were prepared to eliminate the Office of Arts America because they just felt it was not a necessary program. At that point I had another one of those fateful events when the man who was supposed to be going to London as cultural attaché went out jogging one day and came

back home and while changing clothes, fell over dead. This was December '94 and January '95. In fact I was in Japan on a Christmas holiday at that point. When I came back from Japan and found out that he had died, I was absolutely shocked. But as a result of that they suddenly needed somebody to go to London very quickly. There were a number of people in the upper reaches of USIA that were looking for ways to abolish Arts America, and clearly getting rid of me was one of the ways of doing that. You know, they were killing two birds with one stone, sending me to London and filling that post, but also getting me away from Arts America. I was in fact then replaced by a political appointee, the first time there was a political appointee in Arts America. Within a few months of my departure, Arts America was dead. It is a very sad development because many of the great powers in international affairs all have their cultural or arts programs to show internationally what their society is up to.

Granted the United States has always had serious misgivings about the arts and culture as well. Real men don't go to art shows. Sports, yes. Popular culture, of course, no question about that, but when you are talking about high culture or quality culture or arts, that's seen as something slightly subversive or European or aristocratic whatever, elitist. So we have always had a bit of a problem in dealing with the arts or culture in our society not to mention the Foreign Service.

Q: Yes, we are not alone in that. I mean there is that famous statesman Hermann Goering who said whenever I hear the word culture I reach for my pistol. Anyway, London. This is your last post, 1995-'99. What did you do? I don't have to ask about American-United Kingdom relations because there weren't problems, well maybe there was.

BERRINGTON: Well, I went to London kind of assuming it would be like Tokyo, a big post, big embassy, very close relationship. In fact, the British and the Japanese are often compared. You know they are both major states off of continental land masses, island states, naval powers, close relations to the U.S., key monarchies, key elements in the regional power structure, important trading partners the list goes on and on. I mean they are very similar countries in that respect. But when I got there I realized that in fact there was quite a bit of difference. The USIA program in the United Kingdom wasn't nearly as large as that in Japan. There was one very clear and simple reason for this. English is the common language or as Mr. Churchill once said, "This is the language that that divides the two nations." But English is the common language between the UK and the U.S. and it is not in Japan. The cultures are so totally, I mean Japan and U.S. the culture is just positive and negative in terms of similarities or any commonalties. Whereas in the U.S. it couldn’t be closer, more similar, and more common other than maybe the Canadians or the Irish are. So, all the things we did in Japan to sort of get over the linguistic barriers, the cultural, religious and social barriers because of the differences, we didn't have to do in England. There was a much greater reservoir of understanding, and knowledge, and spirit. With Japan you had a devastating war. We never had anything like that with England at all.

Q: The War of 1812, but that has been a while ago.

BERRINGTON: That was some time ago and it's more than made up for that over the years. We didn't have to do the kind of basic speaker programs and all with libraries and the things that are fundamental to an Asian USIA program. Having said that, it is very easy to assume that everything is hunky dory and we don't need to do much. It might even lead to the question why do we bother with a cultural program there at all. Well, the Brits are not as similar to us as you might think. In fact, many of the commonalties they have with the Japanese, the hierarchical society, the very island, kind of insular outlook. The provincialism, very tradition oriented. The Brits are increasingly looking towards Europe more than to the U.S. Now they are part of the European Union. It just makes for a slightly more complicated, not quite as easy going flow of information and understanding as you might ordinarily assume.

One of the points I used to make frequently to my British friends when I was making speeches was that the Anglo-American alliance of WWII was kind of our high point. You know when you had FDR and Churchill and all of that where Americans looked to Mrs. Miniver, the plucky Brit. We all thought that we knew and understood each other very well at that point. Both of our societies have changed radically since then, and changed not just in terms of economy or social mobility or anything like that, but have changed radically in terms of the demographics. American society now includes, not just the Blacks, but we have Asians, Latin Americans, increasing numbers of Islamic immigrants, so that America today, the European or English antecedents are getting smaller and smaller whereas the Pacific and Latin American Americans are getting larger and larger. And the same thing happened in England. The number of people there that are all Hubert Smith and Robert Jones are decreasing in comparison to the sheer number of immigrants coming from the Caribbean, black that come in from the Caribbean, from Africa, Nigeria and Kenya, as well as huge numbers of what they call Asians, but are really more South Asian - Indian, Pakistani - immigrants. Most of these people come from the old colonies of course. But where ever they come from, what ever complexion they have, they are adding to an ethnic mix that Britain has never had before, and is fundamentally changing their society and their outlook just as what happened here with Asian Americans and Latin Americans or Hispanic Americans who our fundamentally changing American society. So the kind of familial ties that we used to have over the years, you know where somebody from Yorkshire had a relative in Illinois, or a Californian could go back and trace his roots to Devon. That is not going to happen anymore. And the unifying experience we had in WWII in common is decreasing, as more and more of these people are showing up in the U.S. They don't even know who Churchill or FDR were. So more than ever, this requires that we do more of the cultural information program because of the radical changes in the two societies. Now having said that, that sounds nice, but where does the money come from? With the kinds of budget cuts we have suffered, it is not there. So it was frustrating because there was a great need to reach out to this new British society, but we just didn't have the resources the people or whatever it took to do it.

Q: So what did you do?

BERRINGTON: Well, one of the cultural attaché's main functions is he is the chairman of the Fulbright program. Now in Japan when I was cultural attaché, I had been one of the Fulbright commissioners. You know, one of the people on the board so to speak. But, in the UK, I was the chairman. That took up a lot more time. The U.S.-UK Fulbright program is one of the most active in the world and the oldest as well. Whether it was selecting grantees, or just getting involved in the daily management of the program, or fundraising. We had a large fundraising program in the UK because Fulbright gets its money from the U.S. government just like other operations, and there was always the threat that that would be cut. We didn't get many cuts in the Fulbright program in the UK, but we didn't get increases, and of course, when you don't get any increases, inflation in effect means a cut. So to help make up for that, we would go out and fundraise the money, and the British and American corporations in the UK might be interested in educational exchanges. One of the ways we did this was we sensed a great interest in the American MBA (Masters in Business Administration) degree. A lot of British wanted to go to the U.S. for an MBA. If Fulbright would provide MBA opportunities, so much the better. Okay, Fulbright doesn't care whether they are going for an MBA, or a degree in art history, or computer science. It is up to the individual student to design his program, but by emphasizing the MBA we could get the corporations to provide money so that say Joe Smith could go to the U.S. on the Smith Klein Beecham scholarship. They saw this as good PR for their company. They also saw it and wisely so, as a good way to kind of help identify who are the good kids out there so that Joe Blow goes on the Smith Klein Beecham scholarship say to the Wharton School in Pennsylvania. Then he comes back, he may very well work for Smith Klein Beecham. So it was one of those arrangements that made almost everybody happy. We were able in the first two years I was there to raise over a million pounds, which is close to 2 million dollars. Now I did not do this all myself.

The board and I would go out and twist arms of friends and you know, get the money. This also turned out to be the time when Fulbright was having its 50th anniversary celebration around the world, the 50th since Senator Fulbright started the program. So we had a big 50th anniversary dinner in London in which we invited Bill Gates to be the guest speaker. He came out.

Q: He is the chairman of Microsoft.

BERRINGTON: Microsoft and one of the biggest names in business in the world. Most people thought that was quite a coup getting Bill Gates to come to London to speak at the Fulbright dinner. It was a black tie dinner. We collected…oh gosh I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars just on the basis of that dinner alone. The Fulbright program was quite a large piece of the pie for me in the UK.

In addition, the American embassy is probably, I think it is safe to say, the most visited embassy in the world based in London. When I say visited, I don't mean the man on the street; I mean by governors, senators, government officials, congressmen, Presidents, Vice Presidents, cabinet officials and so on. Everybody who is going to Europe is going

to stop off in London. Everybody who stops off in London to put a nice gross underneath their trip might give the impression that they are there for business, so they will go to the embassy for at least one day or for one morning or afternoon and have briefings or something involving the embassy. Maybe the ambassador will throw a dinner or one of us will do something. Maybe we might set up meetings with them and university people or the media. Maybe we might arrange for them to go someplace outside of London to meet with important target audience members. But in any case all those bodies passing through London put an incredible drain on our time. There was somebody there almost every day. Now that didn't necessarily involve me every day, but I as a member of an increasingly smaller team as positions were eliminated and budgets were shrunk meant that we all had to contribute day after day, after day, as a joint mission effort.

Q: I'm under the impression that some posts use their Fulbright alumni as a real sort of tool for getting around, getting into society; while other posts just sort of let it go. The UK would be somewhat different because the ties are so close anyway.

BERRINGTON: It is not a bad idea, but I am not sure how good it is. I mean yes, we did that too. We took advantage of the alumni association. We nurtured the relationship, we kept up the contacts. But in the UK, most of the Fulbright alumni were in fact academics. Very few of them became businessmen or government officials. So it was not the most useful element of the population for us to deal with. As I say, it wasn't bad. We enjoyed having them there, but they just weren't that relevant to all the things we were doing.

Q: In the Fulbright program you were talking about the new Brit, the south Asians. Were we making an effort with the Fulbright program to explain what we meant by diversity?

BERRINGTON: Oh, yes, but we didn't have to make an effort. I mean we were happy if it was there, but we really didn't have to try that hard because, most of the young British students of any kind of ambition or aspiration really looked to the United States for better education opportunities particularly in the high tech or business fields. So most of our applications included names and skin colors that you would have never seen say 15 or 20 years before in London. I wasn't there to compare, but others have told me that it was quite a change. So we were getting them because they were coming to us. You also have to remember that one of the downsides about Britain is it is a very class oriented society. It still is. Like the Japanese and other island societies, Britain has its racism as well. So even though there were say the Barbados or Jamaica immigrants or Pakistani or Kenyan immigrants or whatever. These folks did not find an easy time for themselves in the UK. If they were able to get through a University, first of all most of them never made it to Oxford and Cambridge because Oxford and Cambridge are still very reluctant to open up to all aspects of society. But most of them would make it through a good Redford college and then because of the problems in the UK, they were often the ones mostly to get to the U.S. or someplace else.

Q: While they going to the U.S. to study, they had to come back. But that would give them an imprimatur that would be more salable back in the UK.

BERRINGTON: Yes, exactly.

Q: I've heard the comment the Oxford system was beginning to show its age. It no longer was really producing educated people for the present society, as compared to institutions like Leeds and other universities.

BERRINGTON: In fact you have just said the right thing. It is producing scholars, but it is not producing educated people. I mean it is producing all sorts of people who are specialists in very arcane fields. But as far as providing the well rounded educated man or woman, no. As a result, we used to think of Oxford and Cambridge as the top two with Oxford having the edge. Nowadays, like the Japanese the British have embarked on rankings mania that list things one, two, three, four, or five. Cambridge was always number one. What was absolutely shocking for Oxford is that it wasn't necessarily even number two or number three. It might very well be four or five depending on the list. A number of people at Oxford, the more progressive younger concerned professors or administrators were very worried about this. Some of the Oxford colleges were really taking steps to do something about this, and other colleges were just totally unaware of what to do or maybe weren't even concerned. But no, the London School of Economics (LSE) was always right up there. Imperial College was always right up there. Then you had places like Edinburgh University, Durham University, Birmingham and Manchester University. These were all very high ranking schools too. Nevertheless, Oxford and Cambridge still have the kind of cachet that very few other schools had, except maybe the LSE, London School of Economics.

Q: Were we in your job sort of monitoring the British educational system.

BERRINGTON: No. Again that was such a domestic issue. Again first of all we didn't have the staff to do it. I mean the cultural office, in Japan if I had deputy and several assistant CAO's. In London I had one assistant period. That was it, so there weren't the bodies there to do it. In Japan I must have had 30-35 Japanese Foreign Service national staff. In London I had three. You know, we were doing all we could just to keep our heads above water. I mean I was saying about how we were so heavily visited. We were also one of those embassies that got an incredible amount of mail day after day, not necessarily addressed to me as the cultural officer. Most of it would go to the ambassador. Much of it concerned, I want my son to go to college in America. Please help him do that, or I am an American who wants to come and get a job in London. How can I do that. Or my daughter wants to exhibit at a London art gallery. Please tell me how that is possible. Some of them were very serious and worthy writers; some of them not so. Then the ambassador was constantly being invited to things, the Queen's garden parties. But then also maybe to get an honorary degree at University or to open up an exhibit at a museum or to attend the dinner in honor of Lady Pushbottom or whatever. Because he had such a huge amount of this, whether it was the mail or the invitations or the requests for participation in something, he needed somebody to tell him hey you should do this or you shouldn't do it, and if he should do it, what he needed to know to be able to do it credibly,

intelligently, without embarrassing. So, we in the cultural office which tended to get probably a large amount of this mail, passed some down to the ambassador's office for reply, direct or draft a reply for the ambassador's signature. And we would also often have to meet with the ambassador to talk about it, or would have to do a memo with talking points about if he goes to the dinner for Lady Pushbottom, what he needs to know about her so that he doesn't ask a stupid question, or that he knows that Lord Pushbottom has just been released from jail for molesting little boys or something. These are the things that are a part of embassy business in a town like London, so the cultural office in particular got a lot of this. I was just day after day, cranking out the memos, drafting letters, meeting with the ambassador, just dealing with the sheer tidal wave of mail and communication.

Q: It sounds like you were caught in one of the things that is sort of unintended consequences of cut backs on staff, you are trapped in our offices.

BERRINGTON: You have just put your finger on it. There's the biggest dilemma right now. The Congress wants to cut our budget, or they want to allocate what used to be part of our budget over to security affairs, and in the meantime they don't want to cut the program. They don't want to cut any of the activities. You can't have it both ways. If you are going to cut the money, you have got to cut what it going on as well. They don't cut the number of visits they make to London, so we still have to deal with them as visitors and all of the hoo ha that goes on with that. The President was in and out of London it seems like every other month. You can't say no Mr. President, we are not going to handle your visit. I mean it is just an insurmountable issue. Quite frankly it is one of the things that I am happy to be done with. [Editor's Note: President Clinton visited London from November 28 to December 1, 1995; May 28 to 29, 1997; May 14 to 18, 1998; and September 3, 1998. Secretary Christopher visited London on official trips from July 20 to 22, 1995; September 5 to 6, 1996; and October 6 to 7, 1996. Secretary Albright conducted 12 visits to London from February 1997 to March 6, 1999.]

Q: I was going to say it stops being fun.

BERRINGTON: Yes, when it is such a drain on your time, and when you are so tied down to a desk, and you are dealing with kind of bureaucratic nit-picking and other details that anybody could do, that a junior officer could handle but can't because there is no longer a junior officer then right. It is not as much fun. Well, the proof is in the pudding. I developed a high blood pressure problem that I never had before while I was in London. I am sure I wasn't the only one. You know, when I was in Tokyo we just had a much larger staff and were able to cope better. But I am sure there are many places just like London that have serious staff and work responsibility issues like this. They are probably all wondering at this very moment how they are going to deal with it tomorrow.

Now I have to say at the same time, London was one of those interesting assignments where I had both the best and the worst ambassadors. When I arrived it was a man by the name of William Crowe who had been chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral

Crowe. [Editor's Note: Admiral Crowe served as Ambassador to the UK from June 1994 to September 1997.] Admiral Crowe was one of absolutely the best, well I think of him and Mike Mansfield as the two best ambassadors I worked for. Men who were comfortable with themselves, who had already had achievement in government, who knew how to manage staff, were good at going out and dealing with the public, knew the issues, were professional in every sense of the term. My only problem with Crowe was that I don't think he knew an art object from...he was an Oklahoma boy who had no pretensions about being an art lover of any kind. Okay.

I would much rather have somebody like that who is honest about it with no pretension. As a result, he pretty much as Mike Mansfield had done when he was in Tokyo, he pretty much said, "Robin, art and culture, that's your job. If you need me, let me know and I will do whatever you want me to do, but keep in mind it is not my strong suit." As a result many of the things he was invited to or asked to or came his way, he would delegate down to me. If it was worth doing, I did it, and if it wasn't I didn't do it. Fortunately he didn't look over my shoulder and say, "Robin, you said you don't want to do it but I think you should." No, he had confidence in me as he did in other members of his staff, as any good military officer will with this stuff, delegate and then be done with it. He is not constantly second guessing or micro managing from another floor away. So Bill Crowe was fabulous, and the day he left that embassy, September 20, 1997, there were very few dry eyes. I am very lucky to have worked with a great American like him.

Unfortunately his successor was not like that. I felt like saying Phil Lader, you are no Bill Crowe. Philip Lader was a South Carolina property and real estate investor, management office who had had some political activity in South Carolina and became a member of President Clinton's staff in the White House. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Lader presented his credential on September 22, 1997 and left post in February 2001.] I think he was the assistant chief of staff or deputy chief of staff. He also ran a small business administration. Ambassador Lader was a very bright, very capable guy, extremely good looking, and very nice dresser, carried himself very well, and absolutely brilliant speaker. You know, in carrying out the role of ambassador he looked like he came out of Hollywood central casting. But unfortunately he didn't know the issues, and he really didn't care that he didn't know the issues. He was a terrible manager. He was constantly second guessing the staff. He was very poor on communication. Often we didn't know what he was up to. I mean this is part of the management problem. If he was a good manager he would have been regularly in touch with us so that we knew and there wouldn't have been these gaps of information between us. He kept bringing in staff people who would become barriers between us and him. It was a very difficult situation. As time went by it became pretty clear to us that Ambassador Lader was far more interested in going to the dinner parties with the Lady Pushbottom types and dealing with the sort of glamorous elements of British society much more than doing what many of us thought..

Q: Great traps because these don't really go anywhere.

BERRINGTON: No, they don't. I can assure you from my own, I mean other than the ambassador, the cultural attaché is probably the one most likely to also be included in this kind of thing. I cannot tell you how boring and excruciating some of these events were. Talk about pretentious. Talk about shallow, I mean some of these people and their events were just you know, trials of patience. I couldn't wait to get out of there. In fact there were several times when I would just dream up excuses why I had to leave. For some reason, well it is seductive when you are dealing with people with titles like that. I guess, I can't speak for Ambassador Lader but I guess he felt it was important and he got something out of it. Unfortunately, none of us knew about that. As far as we could tell, this was an extension of the mission at large. So I was there with the Crowes for about two and a half years and with Lader for about a year or year and a half. My final year there was difficult. He is still there.

Q: I take it you left with a certain sigh of relief in a way.

BERRINGTON: Well, I left with very mixed feelings, because London is a very curious mission. I mean forget the role of the ambassador although the role of the ambassador can play a key role. The role of the ambassador can play a key element in setting a tone, morale, that sort of thing, and proud of the job, trying to keep morale high. I don't think Lader ever though about if morale was high or low. It just wasn't one of his concerns. But setting the ambassador aside, London was one of those missions, and there are a number around the world, you probably know of some of them yourself, that no matter what happens, seems to have bad morale.

I think it is probably based on expectations. A lot of people go to a place like London assuming oh the theater, oh the glamour, high society, the important policy issues, the ability to travel around England, blah, blah, blah. Well, it doesn't work that way. Many people live far away from the embassy. It is expensive. They have a hard time getting baby-sitters, so they can't do all those things that they would like to do. So they are kind of frustrated by seeing all these opportunities that just don't come their way. Also, it was very curious.

In Japan, many of us in that mission, as I alluded to at the beginning of this, had the Japan experience together with other officers. We went through language school together, or we went to area studies together, or we had been in Japan together. So that we would have repeat experiences and you would come back on your second or third assignment, it's like you are back with old friends. Brothers or sisters or it is like you can sit and have a drink and say hey remember when President Ford came and he forgot his pants, and we had to run out had get his pants. Yes, that is a real story.

Most of the people in London served there once and never again. Now there were a few that had a repeat, but that was very rare very unusual. Most people go there once and that's it. There is no kind of familiarization program like language training or area studies or whatever so you don't have that kind of chance to develop relationships at FSI or someplace beforehand. In a place like Tokyo because of the language and the different

culture, there tends to be a little bit more bonding automatically. In a place like London where everybody speaks the same language, no problems, and people live all over town. I mean I happened to live next door to another embassy officer, but that was only one. Most of the other embassy people lived way miles away. In Tokyo everybody lived in a compound. A compound is not necessarily a good thing, but they do provide that kind of bonding and other experiences that lead to, I think, a little bit better morale. So London is one of those places where morale has never been that good. As a result for the mission, I think many people are frustrated, many people are disappointed, and many people are negative about their time there.

Fortunately my job was one that, many people thought I had one of the best jobs of course, because I did get invited to the royal opera and the ballet. I was out to universities. I traveled a lot around the country, opportunities to meet. Well, have you seen the movie Chicken Run?

Q: No.

BERRINGTON: Okay, I knew the guys that made Chicken Run. These are people you would just meet automatically. So that kind of opportunity makes for a more interesting experience. Everybody else in the embassy did not have those opportunities. So, I was aware of all these problems, of the morale problems. I was aware of the difficult experience many people were having. But fortunately my job more than made up for it. The job made my time in London much more worthwhile and more interesting. There is one other important element here which I cannot overlook and that is the attitude of the British toward Americans. To put a fine point on it, a lot of Brits don't like we Yanks. There is a lot of patronizing attitude towards the United States. It is the sort of mother colony against the baby. Particularly the United States has risen up so high, and the British Empire has collapsed and Britain is now not even a second or third rate power. So there is a lot of that, I am sure, behind the attitude toward the United States. Most Brits see Yanks as being uncouth, totally lacking in etiquette or manners or loud or pushy or demanding. They would just as soon do without us.

Now having said that, government to government relations were extremely good. I am sure Bill Clinton and Tony Blair pick up the phone and talk to each other like old friends. The official relations were extremely good. Over the years I did develop relations with a huge number of British friends. There were a lot of people who didn't have this attitude about the U.S. But it is a pervasive thing throughout British society. How often do you run into people that would say something disparaging about the U.S. It is like Americans are fair game. You can knock them down and, like that doll, will spring back up, and they just automatically assume that. You know, take a punch out at Uncle Sam, that is a good way to get your frustrations out for the day, and they do it. Whether it is articles in the paper, whether it is comments on television, these just flow off of British tongues as though everybody knows it and everybody does it. When you are an American there living and working in British society, it gets very tiresome after awhile. It gets very wearying. Particularly I noticed among Fulbrighters, I noticed after about six months

some of them would get quite bitter about it. Particularly those that were going to places like Oxford and Cambridge where you had bastions of British tradition and sort of arrogance about the Anglo-American relationship. So that clearly affected what a lot of people experienced in their time in London. So it was not an easy embassy. I was happy to put all of that behind me, not having to deal with that anymore. It was not only once or twice that I would go into a party and would look around the room and I would see I didn't know anybody there. Okay, that's fair enough, that is often the foreign service experience. Then I would walk up to somebody who looked like somebody I should know or talk with, and I would say, "Hello my name is Robin Berrington and I am the cultural attaché of the American embassy." They would look at me and they would say, "Oh, I didn't know America had culture." They would go Ha, Ha Ha, aren't I being clever. And just having to deal with that mentality, that I mean well I can remember one luncheon I went to while having minister of state, high ranking cabinet official sit next to me, and from the very first hello I am blah, blah, blah, within minutes he was after me about America this or America that. This was at a Christmas dinner where we were both at the head table. After about fifteen minutes of this, I just got so fed up with it I turned to him and said, "Look I came to this country to build great relations between our two countries. Americans like Britain and I think a lot of British like America. I didn't come here to put up with this kind of crap," and I got up and left. The sponsors of the lunch said, "Why are you leaving? What is wrong?" I said, "You know, I don't feel well." That could be an extremely troubling aspect of living and working in Britain. Now, having said that, let me emphasize a lot of Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen and others are marvelous, and I had a lot of good friends and professional relationships without that problem. But that problem is always there.

Q: Did you ever find a certain affinity or natural cohesion with a Scot an Irish or a Welshman, in other words against the English attitude?

BERRINGTON: Yes. Definitely. In fact I found I went to Wales and Scotland quite a bit. Northern Ireland I was there all the time because of the Northern Ireland problem. So, yes, they would often talk about these exact same things to me as though we were all in the same boat together. It was very moving. I also found that the other commonwealth, the Australians, the Canadians, would often; I mean my duties didn't include them, but we would occasionally bump into each other at a cocktail party or something, and they would often say the same thing. "Oh, when is the last time you had to listen to blah, blah, blah" or whatever. So it was a kind of a common cause.

Q: How did you get involved in Northern Ireland? I mean you tried to bring culture to the IRA?

BERRINGTON: Goodness, no. The mission program in Northern Ireland had a number of tools in its bag of tricks. Among them were educational programs and cultural activities. One of the main goals we had was to show that America was not just Irishmen. That it wasn't just those people in Boston or New York or Chicago who would be giving to NORAID or one of the other organizations that support the IRA. The Americans have a

lot of people that are totally unrelated to this. Also, USIA would issue grants, USIA Washington, would through the embassy issue grants to various organizations in Northern Ireland that contribute to the peace process. For example there was a number of educational programs involving the police where we would have conflict resolution exercises with police and other extremist groups to show that violence was not the way to solve the problems. The Fulbright program there was quite active.

We had another program which was called a Fulbright program but it was slightly different. It was the Fulbright teacher exchange. I don't know if you are familiar with that, but this is where a teacher in England and an American teacher would literally switch places for one year. The American would go to say Belfast or it might be Birmingham or Bristol, not just Northern Ireland. Then the person from that town would go to the teacher's school and they would teach in each other's school for one year. I mean in some cases they would even swap houses and cars and things like that. It was I think, one of the most effective programs at bringing real kind of grass roots people into the other's turf. Particularly in Belfast it was effective because maybe you could bring a Hispanic Catholic into a Protestant community in Belfast. Of course, they weren't allowed to say we want only a Protestant or we only want an Irishman. You had to take who you got. It did more to build bridges just across the sectarian divide, not necessarily between the groups in Northern Ireland, but among, you know, increase understanding and awareness between Catholics and Protestants and what is a Catholic and Protestant role. Many people in Northern Ireland who were Catholic or Protestant never had any experience seeing or meeting each other. You know, they all kept to themselves so much. The teacher exchange was a really effective program at that sort of thing. I was often up there meeting with those people.

We almost had a policy of…well, the cultural office or the deputy or the assistant cultural attaché had a Northern Ireland portfolio so to speak. If he or she was unable to do something, then I would often go up there. I mean it was as if we had a policy of trying to have somebody up there almost every month in some form or fashion. I mean I would go to a dinner party to represent the ambassador or I would go give a speech at a school or whatever. It is the same with the political section and the economic section and the commercial office. Because we had a consulate in Northern Ireland, you know they were more than happy to have us there as well. It was a plum for them because they were understaffed like we were. They were happy to have somebody from the embassy come up and help share the business. But Northern Ireland was probably one of the major responsibilities for us, for the mission at large. So it affected all of us.

Q: To close this off, you retired in '99. What are you up to now?

BERRINGTON: Good question. I am up to enjoying life. Last year, well I came back in February 1999 and about April I had a call from Harriet Fulbright who is Senator Fulbright's widow. She is the executive director of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. Her deputy slot is open and she needs somebody to fill that job. She called me up and wondered if I wanted to do it. I said, "Sure." So that pretty much lasted

most of last year. That was very enjoyable. I have known Harriet for a number of years, so it was easy for me to work next to her. What the President's Committee is doing I always found worthy. I mean it is promoting artistic occupations and goals and looking for arts opportunities arts training for what they call youth at risk. Those kids that maybe would go into gangs or some kind of extra legal activity, if they didn't have something to do after school. The idea is once its 3:00 pm or 4:00 pm and they are out of school, then what do they do until the evening. If you can provide opportunities for them to learn how to dance or play an instrument or make sets for a theater company or anything in the arts like that, any opportunity that would give them you know, build some confidence, keep them busy, get some interest in something beyond you now what happens on the streets. That was good, and I always thought that was an excellent program and I was happy to help with that. That was last year.

This year, well, I am the secretary of my condominium board. I have been asked to join a board that helps young performing arts, I won't say students, kids who have just completed their programs and are out of school and are just on the verge of getting started, a program that looks for opportunities for them to have performance experience. They are going to try to do this in places like hospitals, old people's homes, sort of pushing for penitentiary, and give them the kind of experience where if they go into a competition, or when they start going on the road professionally, it won't be such a new experience and will increase their confidence.

Q: And spread the goodwill.

BERRINGTON: And spread the goodwill too. I mean if they are playing at old people's homes or penitentiaries or whatever, it would have a positive effect there, too. So I am on the board of that. I have been doing a lot of travel. In two weeks I am going back to London for the London and Ireland and Spain for about six weeks. I have been up to New York many times to visit friends. I am doing more reading than I was ever able to do. Gosh, a lot of visitors and friends pass through.

Q: One question, Is your blood pressure down?

BERRINGTON: Oh, yes. Well, I am taking medication. I also learned it is not just London that does this. It is also age.

Q: Well, we will stop at this point. Thank you very much.

End of interview
[Editor's Note: for more on the history of USIA, please read in the ADST-DACOR series: Wilson P. Dizard, Jr., Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004.]