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

PETER BLOOM

Interviewed by: John Pielemeier
Initial interview date: February 28, 2018

This oral history transcription was made possible through support provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development, under terms of Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-F-16-00101. The opinions expressed herein are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

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Biafra war for independence
"African Heritage", Nairobi
USAID program in northern Nigeria
Mission Director Michael Adler
Nigerian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
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Prime Minister Premadasa
Ambassador Jim Spain
Author Arthur C. Clarke
LAC/AA Jim Michel

Administrator Ron Roskens

INTERVIEW

Q: Good afternoon, this is John Pielemeier on February 28, 2018, starting an interview with Peter Bloom, who is a senior Foreign Service Officer with a long and a very interesting career. Peter, we're going to start by my asking you where you grew up and what led you towards working in international affairs?

BLOOM: Well, I grew up in Providence, Rhode Island, and it's a state I still love even though I left after college, like most. We spend summers in Newport, RI.

Q: Where did you go to college?

BLOOM: I went to college at Harvard College and majored in history because at that time people went to college for purposes of liberal arts, not a career, and they didn't think about what to do afterward. Following Harvard, in the early '60s, my choices were to go to medical school, business school, or law school. Medical school seemed formidable, business school was kind of a mystery and it sounded like it was corporate America. Law school seemed like a hedge. I went to Columbia Law School where the Dean of the Law School said that people are there on a calculated drift. So I can't honestly say that I had a great ambition to be a lawyer, I just had to do something after college and it wasn't like in today's world where one can really search around and spend some time and take a break. So I went to law school.

Q: Did you travel overseas before that at all?

BLOOM: The only time I really traveled overseas, like many of us in the early '60s was between my junior and senior year of college when most of us did a three-month tour of Europe. I probably went to 10 or 15 countries, and I did that with my college roommate who is still a very good friend after almost 60 years. And we see each other every year. And that was really my only overseas travel.

After law school I thought I had to go into the military because I had gotten classified 1-A when President Kennedy did a call up in '60 during the Berlin Airlift. I had a huge history of asthma. It didn't matter, they made me 1-A. I got a deferment, went to law school, and was ready to go into a Coast Guard unit in Rhode Island. I took my physical and they said, "You checked for asthma, do you have a doctor?" I said, "I haven't had an attack in years." I was fine and went back to New York and took the bar, and then called home and my folks said, "You got a letter from the Selective Service," and they said, "You are 1-Y," which means you don't have to go in unless it's an emergency. I had given them the name of my pediatrician. I didn't even know if he was still alive. It was 1964 in the summer with the lowest draft call since WWII and the U.S. military was looking to let anyone out of serving that they could.

Then I did go to Europe because I had no interviews with law firms and no future agenda. I went to Paris to try to learn French. I spent a couple of months and got uneasy. And I said, "Maybe I should go to London to the London School of Economics." And I said, "This is crazy, isn't it time to start life?" So I went back to New York in November of 1964. I looked around and went to work for a law firm in New York City. I lasted for about six or seven months and decided I didn't want to spend my life making a lot of money for some already very wealthy people. I decided I wanted to be a labor lawyer. At that time it was a situation where unions were being basically ignored and violating the National Labor Relations Act was common. I went to work for a Board Member at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) as an Attorney Advisor and I did that for about a year and a half.

Here's how I started in development. I had no background, I had no training, I had no education in development whatsoever. I had never thought about economic development, had never thought about Africa or anywhere else, but I had a very good friend in law school named Steven Isaacs. And he didn't like law school very much, but when he finished, he went to Washington and went into the Department of Education, and then he got into USAID. We were in Washington together in our 20s, along with other friends, having a good time, dating, wearing ties and jackets, and enjoying life. Steve pulled me aside one day and said, "Peter, I think you're not really happy with what you're doing. USAID is fantastic." And he started telling me all about it. He gave me copies of *Frontlines,* which I think was a good newspaper back in those days. The stories were intriguing, as were the pictures, but there was nothing in my background that would provide any basis for me to be hired by USAID or any other development agency.

He had a colleague or someone he knew coming in from Nigeria. Nigeria had the largest USAID program in Africa at the time because Kennedy had promised that we would give a substantial program to Nigeria in the early '60s. They were about to open three small Regional Offices, one in Ibadan, one in Enugu, and one in Kaduna. And they were just looking for bodies, but bodies weren't so easy to find, in a way, because we had so many young people in Viet Nam in the CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) Program. I might be wrong about the figure but I think there were something like 2,000 people who were designated at that time as Foreign Service Limited (FSL) (which means limited until removed). It was a very large number. This guy came -- I don't even remember his name, I don't remember whether he came from the Mission, or from USAID Personnel, I don't remember anything about the meeting. I checked with my friend Steve whom I'm still very close to, and he didn't remember exactly either. But I know that this USAID staffer looked at my resume and talked to me and said, "Listen, I see you're a history major, I see you're a labor lawyer, this isn't rocket science. Would you like to go to Enugu?" And I said, "Where's that?" And he said, "Well, it's in Nigeria, it's in the East." And I said, "That's in Africa, right?" I knew that much, but not really much more. And they offered me the job and I accepted. This was 1967.

Q: Were you sworn in and hired as a lawyer, a Program Officer, a Project Officer, or something else?

BLOOM: I was hired to be a Junior Program Officer, an assistant type, in a newly created small Regional Office. I had no training, no background, no experience whatsoever and probably no intrinsic interest in development. Zero! I had never thought about it, had never read a book about it. I wasn't an economist though we all took Economics 1 in college. Enugu was the capital of what became the first major secessionist movement in Africa and what became the country that called itself Biafra, named after the Gulf of Biafra on the southern border of Nigeria and Cameroon.

Shortly thereafter, when I had actually gotten onboard and been sworn in to USAID, the Biafran War started. And suddenly the post for which I had been hired was no longer open.

Well, around the same time, I don't have the days exactly correct, the Mission decided they had to evacuate all dependents, which they did. They were using cables for communication in those days, and they sent a cable saying, "Do not send anybody out to post anymore." And I walked into the USAID/W office and said, "What am I supposed to do? I've pretty much packed up, I've ended the lease for my apartment, and I've sold my car, because I thought I was leaving in two weeks."

There was a wonderful man running the backstop office. I don't remember if it was just for Nigeria or for a wider area of West Africa. He was Haven North, a man whom everybody loved and whom everybody knows about, and you can find out about Haven from a lot of different sources. He was one of the most wonderful people that existed. And he said, "Well, you can stay here and have a job and you'll get paid." I said, "That's fine, but where am I going to live and what am I going to do with my stuff?" And this is true and it's still a mystery. A cable came in the next day or two after. I was shocked. It said, "Send Bloom." I couldn't believe it and the USAID/W Office didn't understand it.

Nonetheless, what happened is that I proceeded with great trepidation and no skills, not knowing where I was going to go because Enugu, at that point, was part of Biafra and was being evacuated by both Nigerians and Americans, because it was being attacked, and I had no clue what I was supposed to do. There were people who had already been selected for Ibadan and Kaduna.

The person selected for Ibadan was a man named Al Donovan who subsequently spent his life in Africa, mostly in Kenya, and lived in and designed and created the most beautiful and most photographed house in Africa even to this day. Al is still there and wrote a wonderful book about his journey in Africa. He bought all kinds of African art and cloth, promoted dancing from every country and centered it all in Nairobi. It was called African Heritage. And that is something somebody could easily still look up.

This house is exquisite and many, many people, including Presidents, have visited and stayed there. But anyway, Al was going to Ibadan and somebody was going to Kaduna. So, I remember arriving very close to midnight, with no clue about I was doing, just sort of looking at fires burning as the plane descended, and I got off the plane.

Q: In Lagos?

BLOOM: Yes, in Lagos, which then was a city of about a million people. But it was still as chaotic as today, now a city of 15 million people. Anyhow, I had one suitcase. By the way, my entire shipping allowance was one trunk weighing 100 pounds. That was all I was authorized. It didn't make any sense. But I said, "I'll buy stuff." So I got off the plane and got through Customs and what I saw were about 200 Nigerians willing to take my bags and anything else I had. I was really alarmed and had no clue and no idea and no experience. Happily, I heard this American-accented voice -- it was a "mzungu", meaning a white person. It turned out he was with the Peace Corps. He said, "Listen, I'll give you a ride into town and I'll get you into a hotel, and you'll figure it out." And thank God that happened because I have no idea what I would have done in terms of getting into a taxi in Lagos. I was scared and very wet behind the ears.

Anyone who has had any experience like that can understand why that could be a fearful event. At any rate, that's what happened. I guess I had the Mission's telephone number and I called them the next morning. They had no clue why I was sent or who I was. They had no record, they said, of anybody coming. I do now remember, when I was at the airport, that I asked people, "Was there anyone from USAID to meet me?" And people said, "No, everyone who was out there that day was being evacuated, and those were the dependents." So I was really in this incredible netherworld asking myself, "What is this all about?" But, nonetheless, the Administration Officer of the Mission said, "Alright, I'll send you a car and we'll pick you up." I got there. Nobody in that Mission knew why. Nobody understood, and nobody professed to sending in a cable saying "Send Bloom."

Well, at that point the Biafran War had really heated up. Enugu was pretty much evacuated by most of the Nigerians. The Igbos were the major tribe and they were the ones who basically created the State with the idea that they had a lot of oil reserves and that they ought to be independent and should be able to construct the country as they wanted. They were very much more the educated tribal group and very prominent. And that's something somebody could easily look up as well.

What ended up happening was that USAID kept me in Lagos, along with the two other people, Al Donovan and the other person intended for Kaduna, to work on program documents. Now, keep in mind, I knew nothing. But for my first two or three weeks, I was on the midnight to 8:00 A.M. radio shift helping people being evacuated from the East. And these were USAID, State, and Peace Corps types, and I was just keeping in contact and getting information and giving whatever information I could give them. And one of them is still a very good friend of mine, although I didn't know him at the time. He was a Peace Corps Volunteer in the East. That was Ned Greeley whom John Pielemeier knows just as well, and we're still very good buddies. Yes, he remembers well being evacuated out of Eastern Nigeria at the time.

What happened after a couple of months that summer is that the person who was going to Kaduna went there and within a couple of weeks resigned from USAID and joined the

Ford Foundation. So I was saying to myself: "What does he know that I don't know?" But USAID said: "Okay, great. Now we have a place for you to go." And there I was, probably in the fall of 1967, 27 years old with zero experience, sent up to this town of Kaduna which then was the capital of the Northern Region. There were no States in Nigeria at that time. It was a dusty little small town. There was no communal violence then that you might have been reading about over the past several years. At the time there wasn't even a sense in Kaduna that a war was really going on.

It was a small office with a large program in the North. And I was kind of thrown into this little office as a Junior Program Officer without a Senior Program Officer in place, dealing with documents, with different government agencies, with contractors, but with no experience. And I would tell people, at 27, I'm in Nigeria, and I have no experience, and I have no idea what development is about. There were virtually no paved roads, and no women to date. And even though the Peace Corps was around, it was an era when Peace Corps Volunteers were told not to mingle with USAID people, because we were too much government and there was a lot of suspicion there. I couldn't have been less prepared. Probably nobody got hired by USAID like that except me. At least I've not talked to anybody who was. And it was not through any program and it certainly couldn't happen now or even 40 years ago. It was really a very anomalous crazy situation. Just serendipitous.

Q: Who was your boss in Kaduna, do you remember?

BLOOM: It was an older man near retirement who wasn't very dynamic and I don't remember his name.

Q: Okay.

BLOOM: And there was a nice guy who was the head of the Consular Office – there was a Consulate in Kaduna - who was pretty good. He would use me as he could. I don't remember his name but he was helpful. But what were we doing in Northern Nigeria? We were trying to create the North like the West of the United States in three years when it took us 40 years to develop our West. In other words, we had many technical assistance projects going on, including having the Bureau of Land Management and the Soil Conservation Service there. We also had the University of Kansas setting up a Veterinary Faculty in Zaria which is between Kaduna and Kano. They were crisscrossing the North with all these projects and we were going to pull in the nomadic cattle people, the Tuaregs, into projects like range management. We were setting up abattoirs to cut meat like Westerners would want.

In fact, we had direct hire cowboys from Montana and Wyoming living in trailers near Maiduguri and Sokoto, who related very well to their Nigerian counterparts. But it became clear that there was no way that we were going to change centuries of nomadic culture in three years. It made no sense, but I didn't know at the time that it made no sense.

In fact, one advantage, I think, of going to Africa in your late 20s in the mid-60s, is that you really had a lot of hope because Africa was pretty new. Most countries were gaining their independence, starting with Ghana in 1958. And you really believed that with technical assistance, with training, with projects, with funding for equipment, material, etc., within a few years Nigeria and other African countries would become much more like Western countries.

As an aside, I would say that it was probably really good to be naïve at the time because I think we're not in such a different situation today. I think it's myopic to think how much can really be achieved even now, and I'm not convinced. So much of Africa is so different in those terms. In some ways Nigeria was a much better place then because the oil money hadn't hit. Nigerians were then developing their own agriculture, they were exporting palm oil, and they were really using their indigenous resources. It probably would have become, I think, a much better country than what has happened today, which is that it's paramount in terms of corruption. It has the largest population in Africa and might be fifth or sixth largest country in population in the world in a few years. But anyway, for me it was fascinating.

Q: Did you travel around the North?

BLOOM: I traveled around the North a lot. I went out to Maiduguri several times, which is now, when you read the newspapers, where the focus is for Boko Haram. But it was nothing like that then whatsoever. I traveled to Sokoto which is as far to the West in the North as you can get. And I went to Katsina where you had a famous Emir with the Sallah and other traditional ceremonies. And all of that was fascinating to me. But we were traveling on red laterite roads which were very rutted, and these were ten or twelve-hour trips. And they were bone shaking and then we only had Land Rovers which had very few springs in them. They weren't like the Toyota Land Cruisers which came in later. That's very important because your body got really shaken up and by the time you reached your destination, it probably took you two days to get the red out of your hair, if you could find water to shower in the rest houses where we stayed.

But the fact that I knew nothing and was so naïve and was so curious and was so interested was a positive. I had no ability to have a development theory and had no reason to doubt the validity of these projects. In retrospect much of it was ridiculous, and I can say almost to a point, except for possibly Zaria University, that every single project that we tried in the North failed. There was no way to change 1,000 years of nomadic Tuareg cattle people and contain them. But I didn't know any of that. And that's a good thing. And I had a certain amount of energy.

The other thing going on that was interesting, and I traveled with them, was that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) was on its mission to eliminate smallpox, and they were vaccinating virtually every village in the world. They were very big in Nigeria. I would hook on a ride with the CDC team, and there were some young doctors and others, and I got to see a lot of the North which I found very interesting.

Also, Kaduna still had a little vestige of the British occupation of the Raj. There was the Kaduna Club where you had to wear a tie and a long-sleeve shirt, but not necessarily a jacket, and where women could not cross the barroom floor. And where Sunday there were curry lunches with a Nigerian band playing 'Waltzing Matilda' outside.

Q: Excuse me. A woman couldn't cross the barroom floor but she could be in the barroom?

BLOOM: No. Sorry, I misspoke. She could not be in the barroom but she could get a drink brought to her. I had to wear a long-sleeved shirt and a tie but not a jacket. There were a lot of Brits around still and I saw them in different towns and places, they hadn't totally pulled out. And so it was actually a fantastic experience and I probably saw as much of the North as anybody. This included an incredible polo match with the British team coming up from Lagos to play against the Northern Nigerians, with the team led by the Emir of Katsina who had a ten-goal handicap, as high as you can get. It was the first polo match I had ever seen. These were fantastic horsemen. And so all of these experiences were fascinating, and it was wonderful to be young and unknowing, to be honest, and to not have any development theory, or economic training, and not having to explain why we were doing this and that. Just absorbing.

Q: How long were you there?

BLOOM: I spent a year.

Q: Just one year?

BLOOM: Just one year in Kaduna. But then the Biafran War really heated up. This was the first major secessionist movement as I have already noted. And then what the world started to see, for the first time, something which is so commonplace now, was starving children with swollen bellies, with red hair from kwashiorkor. The Federal Government was taking more of the territory which Biafra had claimed, which is most of Eastern Nigeria, and they euphemistically called it the 'Federally Liberated Territories'. There was a lot of pressure, not just on the U.S. Government, but on all governments and agencies to do something, basically because of the pictures of starving children, and of people dying. Today it's commonplace. You probably just skip the page in the newspaper. Then it was really big news on the covers of *Life* and *Time* Magazines.

So they brought me to Lagos to work with one of the most wonderful human beings I've ever met in my life. This was a man named Ed Marks who was an expert on relief, rehabilitation, and refugees. I was sort of ancillary and he needed an assistant and they said, "Okay, let's bring Bloom down from Kaduna because not much is going on." And I so I went to work for Ed. And that was probably one of the most meaningful experiences I ever had.

In addition to which, the Mission Director for Nigeria during these very difficult times when you had to evacuate all dependents, was a wonderful man named Michael Adler. I

believe there is an award in USAID for administration still under his name. He had a great sense of life, of humanity, humor, but seriousness. He liked young people, and he couldn't have been a better person to build morale in a place where spouses and children were gone. We didn't know where the war was going. In addition to which, Lagos was under a blackout my entire time there.

But anyway, I went to work for Ed and we absolutely bonded. He and his wife were like parents to me and I needed something like that, to be very honest with you. And Ed was a good tennis player. I got him into the Lagos Lawn Tennis Club, which is where the Nigerians play tennis versus where the British played, at the Ikoyi Club.

The Lagos Lawn Tennis Club had neither a lawn nor a clubhouse, but good Nigerian tennis players who would be happy to drink a Star beer in between sets and we created a lot of friendships at that place. But the situation was really intense, not stressful, but intense in terms of the pressure, not just on us, but for the world to respond to for the first time, what seemed to be a human tragedy in Africa. Things had probably been going on in other places, but it never had the kind of attention the Biafran War engendered. And so there was a lot of pressure to get things done and get food, vehicles and so on there.

This is kind of interesting. The body that was heading this operation, and was supposed to coordinate amongst all donors, was the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). Geneva based, French Swiss. They had never done a relief rehabilitation effort up until that point at all. They were strictly dealing with prisoner of war swaps, visiting prisons, and promoting human rights. The person they sent out was a delightful, very sophisticated French guy who was hopeless in a situation where you didn't have telephones and everything at your service, and things worked, and people called back. And frankly, the ICRC was an abject failure. The United States responded very well in many ways, but I would give most of the credit to the American Red Cross who came out with groups of people and some medical teams with young nurses from little towns in Indiana, and places like that. And did what they could.

The pressure on the Mission to report to Washington what was happening was so intense that Mike had this idea, and it became part of my first job over the initial several months. I was to go around town every day and find out who was doing anything or sending anything out to these "liberated" areas. Food, vehicles, blankets, drugs, whatever it would take. He said, "I don't care if it's just one camel. You find these things, write it up, clear it with the Embassy, with the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), and that's your job." And so I did that. I met a lot of the NGO (non-governmental organization) types, and other donors, and went around. And at 2:00 in the afternoon I wrote up whatever I had found, which might be one camel going out, and the DCM cleared it and I brought it back. Mike said the best way to ward off all the questions from Washington was just to flood them with as much information and indicate that there was an awful lot of activity going on. And that was a very, very clever and bright strategy.

And actually it served me well, which will be part of a later story, when I was Mission Director in Sri Lanka when USAID/W thought, because of the war going on, that nothing

was happening. And I just told the Mission, "Every day I want someone to write a cable about a trip they took. I don't care what you say in it, it doesn't matter." But it taught me a lesson. And that served me very well in Sri Lanka. They said, "Oh my God, you people are really doing something." I learned that from what Mike did and I thought it was a very, very bright way to deal with it.

Q: Did you have a personal relationship with Mike? Did you get to know him pretty well?

BLOOM: I got to know Mike very well because he focused a lot on the war crisis. He liked young people. He was charming. I remember being with him a number of times and we would discuss what was happening. I never thought about it as work. In fact, ever since I stopped being a lawyer, I never felt I had a job. I mean, USAID to me was my life and it was wonderful. And I feel that way strongly. But we would be sitting around at 8:00 or 9:00 or 10:00 at night trying to figure out what to do and how to do it. And Mike would look up and he had these little glasses he would push up on his forehead. And he would say, "You know what? We're probably the only three people in this country thinking about what we should do about Nigerian relief, including all the Nigerians." And he wasn't wrong. So I spent a lot of time with him. And it was very rewarding in that sense.

And Ed was also charming, bright, humorous, a tennis player, and he wrote songs and plays, with his wife Margaret who was an artist. But he just was incredible in terms of what he knew and how he knew it, and how he got things done.

Thus I got a kind of training which was totally atypical. I mean it was nothing like project development, it wasn't program officer training, it wasn't technical training, it wasn't project training. I was really trying to learn how to deal with what was an enormous human tragedy unfolding which the world is paying a lot of attention to.

But then I started learning the constraints that one could never even figure out, such as how to get supplies into Nigeria. I remember very clearly a USAID person in Washington who got an award because he figured out how to put nine or ten badly needed trucks, that would haul food out to Eastern Nigeria, onto an airplane. The trucks arrived in Lagos and the Nigerian Government said, "Well, you've got to pay customs and duties." And USAID said, "That's ridiculous. This is for your benefit." And so this guy won an award for getting all of these vehicles on a plane and they sat for two months in Customs and USAID refused to pay. The U.S. Government said, "There's no way we're going to do this." And finally, the ICRC, which shouldn't have had to do so, did pay, and the trucks were released. The irony of working in that environment was that what seemed logical to me, who grew up in a system that sort of functioned, was a very different reality in Africa.

There was a very good person who was head of the Nigerian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. He was the former Police Chief of Nigeria, and his name was Timothy Omo-Bare. And he liked me for some reason that I don't really understand. But I was always there with Ed and we bonded well. So we worked well with them.

And I'll tell you one wonderful story about when Ed and I went one time to Omo-Bare's office. It's an example of what it was like to be working in Nigeria. Then you didn't have telephones. You'd pass by, you'd hope someone would be in. But we had an appointment and we walked into his office. There was a nice large attractive Nigerian woman, wearing a big Yoruba headdress and a pretty outfit, sitting behind the desk. We came in and said, "We have an appointment with Mr. Omo-Bare, is he in?" Well, she looked at us and then she got up from her desk and slowly went to the door of his office. She got down on her knees, looked through the keyhole, and turned to us and said, "Yes, he's in." We just cracked up. Ed and I just absolutely turned around and cracked up.

He memorialized this in a book he wrote in his 90s, which was called *Still Counting: the Life and Follies of a Nonagenarian,* a phenomenal book. I was able to see Ed two weeks before his death at 95 in California.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Peter, was it two years that you were in Nigeria?

BLOOM: Yes, two years in Nigeria, one in the North, and one working out of Lagos.

Q: So, as your first tour, what were you pleased about, and what were you perhaps not so pleased about?

BLOOM: Well, for the time in the North, it was all so interesting and new to me that I just found it interesting and adventurous. And I said, "No matter whether we make progress or not, this is clearly an exciting thing to be doing." But I also, at some level, was a little bit bored because there wasn't a lot of social life. Getting down to Lagos was a dramatic shift because life was a lot more exciting, and there was a lot going on. During my entire time in Lagos, the city was in a blackout because the Nigerian government was afraid that the "Government of Biafra", whatever that was, would fly planes over it and drop bombs. And it happened just one time.

I don't remember exactly what all the restrictions were, but what I do remember is that we supposedly had these curfews. It was dark, but I had some young friends in Lagos. Barry Veret, Al Donovan, I and others who wanted to get out. We wanted to go to these clubs because, as people know, West African music is great and dancing to the High Life was really the essence of that culture. As a young person, you want to be involved in things like that. There was a great club called the Maharani and there was a famous Nigerian recording artist named Fela Ransome-Kuti. In fact, there was a wonderful play, called "Fela", which played recently in New York about his life and his music. And his music is still played.

So we would get into a car and drive out, and it was very dark, and there would be check points. And you had these young Nigerian soldiers with fixed bayonets who probably had three weeks of training and who were probably as scared as we were. They would stop us. I remember very clearly the first time. I was in my Volkswagen, wrongly a left- hand drive car. And these soldiers were saying, "Stop!" You could barely see them and so you

stopped. And we didn't know what was going to happen. And then they said, "Open the boot. Open the bonnet." And I was thinking, "What the hell is a boot, and what the hell is a bonnet?" So I got out of the car, as did Barry who was with me, and I said, "Fine, why don't you do it?" And they looked at me and undid the hood and I said, "Ah, that's what it is." And the boot, they opened that, and I said, "Oh, the trunk. That's what it is." It reminded me of a statement that Winston Churchill once made: "Two great countries divided by a common language."

Q: Right.

BLOOM: Anyway, we did a lot of that. And we went to these Sunday jumps and so for young people we had a social life. Mostly not intimate relationships, but mixing with Nigerians, and women on the dance floors were always getting you to buy them a drink or do whatever. But they'd drop by your house also and cook you a meal and there was no *quid pro quo*, it was just kind of a friendship and it all seemed fine. It was a very rewarding part of life because we went to the Island Club, which was a big elite Yoruba club, and so we really could get involved with Nigerians. They're open and friendly, mostly Yorubas. You may not want to go into business with them, but you certainly would want to socialize with them and play tennis with them. And that was very good.

Let me tell you about an interesting trip to the East as part of my work – one of the most remarkable days of my young life. Ed let me go out East to monitor the program and knew I had met a very pretty young 20-year-old nurse from Mishawaka, Indiana, who was with a relief medical team, based near Enugu.

We were driving together in a Red Cross Land Rover, delivering food aid near Biafran territory. On the way back to Enugu we were close to curfew. I think we were lost. We got stopped by Nigerian soldiers near a smashed-up vehicle with a bloody soldier. They ordered us to take him to a make-shift hospital in Enugu. I said, "No, this is a Red Cross neutral vehicle and no guns are allowed." That didn't work. They piled into our Land Rover, with the nurse, Judy Baker, who jumped in back and administered to their wounded colleague.

I was driving on rutted dirt roads, with wounded soldiers (from an accident from drinking) and a pretty nurse, and we were past curfew and lost. I felt like Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms.* To make a long story short, we made it to the make-shift hospital. Then I had to get Judy back to her base, but I needed the password to get by the soldiers. They gave it to me. At the first roadblock, Nigerian soldiers just pointed their guns with fixed bayonets at our car. After a few minutes of not knowing what to do and being worried, I stuck out my head and asked them to say the password. They said, "Forest." I answered, "Trees." They put their guns down, laughed a lot, let us through, and all went well. In some ways this has remained one of the highest adrenaline days of my life.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: I come from Rhode Island and now I have a place in Newport that I have had for 30 years. It's the sailing capital of America. I had never sailed before I went to

Nigeria. There was a little sailing club in Lagos run by the British and I said, "Maybe it's about time. Maybe I ought to learn." A friend of mine in USAID was a young guy Mark Winter whom John may also know. We bought a small sailboat because the British try to con you into joining and racing in the class. I remember our first time going out in the boat. There was a bridge to the left of the yacht club when we started moving rapidly toward it. We didn't know how to turn the boat around and said, "We had better capsize." And we did because, if not, we would have lost the mast. But the real point of the story is that here is somebody, me, who now goes back to Rhode Island and lives in Newport and sails. I love saying, "I grew up in Rhode Island and learned to sail in Lagos, Nigeria." People like that story -- and it's a real story.

But it was very rewarding because I think the U.S. did a terrific job and was really at the forefront of pushing the relief and rehabilitation effort. And I have tremendous respect, admiration, I would even say love, for Ed and his wife as parents. Mike couldn't have been a nicer, more democratic Mission Director. He used his first name, liked young people, and was encouraging in that sense, which I think helped in my mind to formulate the idea that maybe USAID was an interesting place. Because earlier in this story, I said I just kind of joined because my friend Steve Isaacs said, "You ought to do something." And to me it was going to be two years, though not the Peace Corps, and I guessed I'd go back and be a lawyer. I wasn't terribly serious about any of it.

Well, at the end of the two years, I had found it to be a terrific job. I got along very well with everyone at USAID and in the Nigerian Government and they wanted me to stay. But I was turning 30 and decided, "You know, I really would like to get married and it isn't going to happen here in Lagos."

To make a long story short, I said, "I'll go home by way of Bangkok, Thailand, because that's where my friend Steve, who had been in Washington, got posted. And he had gotten married. And it sounded like a good idea anyway after two years in Africa. And Bangkok was Bangkok in 1969, with everything you know about Bangkok. And no AIDs. The Vietnam War was going on, this was an R & R spot.

So I flew to Bangkok and spent of a couple of enjoyable weeks, but within a few days of being there, my friend Steve's wife said, "I teach English with this girl who had been in Africa for a couple of years. She'd been a Peace Corps Volunteer, she's an American, do you want to meet her?" And I said, "No, why would I want to meet an American in Bangkok?" A 'farang,' which is a foreigner. "I'm going back to the States." Well, they invited her over to dinner anyway -- her name was Gretchen Brandow.

She had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in Togo and had decided to go home by way of Malaysia where her brother was a Peace Corps Volunteer. She couldn't get a job there and decided to stay in Bangkok and basically stayed for almost a year and taught English to foreign students. So, they did invite her over and I remember picking her up and getting in the car and grumbling a bit here and there. Anyway, over my next two or three weeks, we saw more than a lot of each other and at the end of the day, some months later,

she came back to the States, moved in with me and never left. She's my wife to this day, 48 years later. So it was fairly serendipitous.

Q: A great story.

BLOOM: Yeah. It's a good story. If she tells the story, she will say that we met because she was dancing nude on the top of a table in an after-hours bar in Bangkok!

Q: That's probably not true.

BLOOM: No, but somebody else was. But it wasn't her.

Q: So had you been assigned to a new post?

BLOOM: That's a very good question, John. When I got to Bangkok, it was very intense in terms of Mission responsibility to work on the counter intelligence program in Thailand. People were taking summer leave, and this was around July, and the office that Steve was working in really wanted me to stay. And boy, did I ever want to stay! And I said, "Wow, this would be fantastic." I was enjoying myself, I had met somebody, the work was very meaningful, it was very interesting, it was a big city. I had even found an apartment which had tennis courts to use, and Steve was a great tennis player partner. The Mission made a request to Washington and they said, "No, we need him back here."

Well, I traveled around a bit in Thailand with my friend and his wife, and with Gretchen, and they made a second big attempt. And they really made an effort and I would have absolutely stayed those two months, and probably would have said, "I'd like to do this rather than go back to the U.S." For reasons that no one has ever explained, or could have explained, or did explain, Washington absolutely refused to let me stay on a TDY (Temporary Duty) assignment, even though the Mission had agreed to pay for everything. So I had no choice. After a few weeks I went on to Hong Kong where I had a very good friend who was a journalist and actually took Gretchen with me. And we are all still good friends.

When I got back to Washington, they had absolutely no idea why I had come back. It was like my going out. It was like, "Well, no, you'll just have to go around and try to find some work." I never found out who said no to my staying on in Bangkok.

Let me go back a little bit. In my first two months in Lagos, the initial two months before going to Kaduna, I got a letter delivered to me in Lagos from the Office of Personnel at USAID saying, "Dear Mr. Bloom, thank you very much for your interest in USAID but we have no position for anybody with your qualifications." "We regret it, but we appreciate your interest." I took this letter to Mike Adler and I said, "Mike, what am I supposed to do, get on an airplane and go home?" He just laughed and said, "No, you'll probably get about five more of these before you leave the Agency." And that's absolutely true, but it really blew my mind. And that's exactly what happened, and that was after being sworn in.

So anyway, I basically searched around and said, "Well, I'm still not sure I want to stay with USAID but I need to do something." And what seemed to be appealing were projects that were then called capital development. And we had Capital Development Officers and it means exactly what it sounds like. These projects were roads, ports, bridges, transport, other projects like those. And there was a terrific office in the Africa Bureau headed by another wonderful man whom everybody liked and whom we think of as the 'Father of all Capital Development Offices'. A man named Al Disdier. Other USAID friends who worked for Al Disdier included John Westley, Owen Cylke, and Art Fell. All of us Capital Development Officers who were young were mentored by this incredibly warm bright encouraging person. You can't say enough good things about him. So I started to learn the business.

I still wasn't so intrigued about staying. I mean, you're in USAID Washington at that point and what a contrast to working on Biafra relief and rehabilitation, and being out there and touching and feeling the pulse of what you're supposed to be doing. And in DC you go to work and you're working on paper and you have no idea about its relevance.

So I was really thinking about staying only three or four months. Well, maybe I'll go back, I thought, and try to find a job in a law firm and resurrect what I thought I was going to do in life. Not that I had a passion for it, by the way. Or for law school. I thought of law school as vocational education. I loved college. But anyway, two things happened.

I was back in Washington, probably by about September or August, and about January I got this telegram from London from this Gretchen Brandow saying she had left Bangkok and was coming to Washington and asked if she could stay with me. I hadn't made any commitments and we had only known each other a few weeks, but in fact, she moved in with me. This is a little relevant. It was at 1823 Q Street in Washington D.C., off Dupont Circle. We now live at 2031 Q Street in Washington D.C., so it took us 47 years to go two blocks!

But anyway, Congress decided that it wanted to set up two Regional Offices in Africa to do capital development work. One in Abidjan for West and Central Africa and one in Nairobi for East and Southern Africa. And they started looking around for staffing. And I was as junior as you could be, but I don't think it was rocket science, to be honest with you. I think it was just good sense, and if you had a good sense of business and economics, you could learn the business of how to do the analysis. People were willing to go to Kenya, and John Westley did. But people kept turning down Abidjan. And I was thinking, "Well, that could be interesting, and I could learn French." Meanwhile Gretchen, who was fluent in French because of her Peace Corps Volunteer program in Togo, thought it was an appealing idea, and so I threw my name in the hat and, sure enough, they offered me the job for an office that was being newly created.

Q: What year was this?

BLOOM: This was 1970.

Q: I'll just mention that the REDSOs, the Regional Economic Development Support Offices, came about, as I understand it, from David Shear, who had spent a year at the War College and he wrote a paper about setting up two Regional Offices to support smaller Missions throughout Africa. And that lead to the acceptance and the idea of creating those offices.

BLOOM: That's quite possible but the original two offices were just Capital Development Offices. The Abidjan one was called WARCDO, the West Africa Regional Capital Development Office. Later, they did become what David Shear had proposed, there's no question about it. They became Support Offices with many multi-skilled type people that all Missions couldn't have in house.

Q: Okay.

BLOOM: We had three Project Development Officers, three engineers, one lawyer, and a wonderful guy heading it who really knew what he was doing, named Don Gardner. And there were just the seven of us. But anyway, all this was coming to a head in the spring of 1970 and I don't think this is exactly right but I said to Gretchen, "Would you like to go back to Africa?" And Gretchen said, "Well, the only way I could do that is if you marry me." It was a little more romantic than all of that, but it definitely was a push point and I really had known her for only six months which is different in today's world, I think. But I had to make a decision and the decision was a good one.

We ended up getting married actually in Criminal Court on 5th Street because we had to find a judge. Her family from Minnesota, whom I had never met, came to the ceremony. She knew my parents, and on the day of our marriage, we went to the Criminal Court building. There were only black cops and black prisoners standing in front of the building. I had never met her parents until the night before, it was really kind of shocking for them, coming from very Scandinavian MN, with not a lot of diversity.

It was a nice little ceremony in Judge Murphy's chambers with family and a few friends. The judge made a nice comment when he said, "This is the only case in which I'm empowered to give a life sentence." This made both sets of parents quite happy. We did have a big party that night in a place called Law House, which was a free-standing old house in Southwest Washington DC on the Potomac, when nothing else was there. It is still there and now it's surrounded by a condo called Tiber Island. We did have a lot of friends come to the party, some of whom didn't even know we had gotten married that day.

And off we went to Abidjan via Nigeria, with a stop in Lagos. This is a good part of the story because Gretchen will say, when she gets a Nigerian driver in a taxi or an Uber, "I had my honeymoon in Lagos." How this happened is as follows: When traveling with the USG, you have to take an American carrier. You had to then; you still have to now. Pan Am flew from New York to Casablanca and Casablanca to Lagos. We honeymooned in Morocco and had a wonderful time. Then I said, "Let's stop and spend three days in

Lagos." I took Gretchen back to my old haunts and old dance places. All the women were still around. They were nice and not embarrassing. So Gretchen tells these drivers, "I honeymooned there." And often she gets free rides. That's a true story!

Then we went from Lagos to Abidjan. I was the first new person in the office which, at the start, was in the Embassy. We weren't a big office; we ultimately were seven people with some good French secretaries. We traveled a lot. At that time Abidjan was not the Ivory Coast of today. It was then called the 'Paris of West Africa'. There were 60,000 French living in Abidjan. Everything you did was French, with French service providers: your haircut, your elevator repairman, your baker. You got imported fresh French cheese and meat every day. In a crazy way it was a paradise. You could go out and dance and it was a totally safe place. We had a sailboat in the Baie de Cocody. There is almost a case to be made for a kind autocratic dictator like Houphouet-Boigny who kept the country together. But that's another story about the history of Africa and what works and what doesn't work, and what we try to do. I just want to make the point that Abidjan was a delightful place then.

Very happily, Gretchen got hired quickly by the Peace Corps as a local liaison to the Volunteers by the then Director Hal Fleming, who was a wonderful man who wrote several excellent books. He was a very agreeable guy: everyone called him 'Bon d'Accord Hal'. John knows what that means.

[Note: John Pielemeier trained for the Peace Corps with Gretchen, at Oberlin in Ohio, in French Canada, and in the Cote d'Ivoire. He then was posted to the Cote d'Ivoire when she went to Togo.]

Q: This was 1970?

BLOOM: Yes, it was 1970. Gretchen was fully employed, not for a lot of money, but it didn't make any difference. She played a real role. We could go out and dance the High Life and do whatever, and, as in all these French countries, there would be long lunch breaks, so we would go home and eat in about five minutes and take a nap.

We were a Regional Office so we traveled a lot. I had a lot of responsibility, mostly for Cameroon, Chad and Niger. There were three Regional Offices at that time. The one in the Cameroon was headed by Chuck Grader, a wonderful person who became a lifelong friend. He ultimately served as a USAID Mission Director in seven countries and then became the "Director General" of the biggest bauxite company in the world based in Guinea. Sadly, he passed away a couple of years ago.

The office in Niger was headed by Sarah Jane Littlefield who was a character in her own right. Definitely. And the one in Dakar, I don't remember the person at the time. But I was mostly focusing on Chad and Cameroon.

We were getting involved in projects dealing with roads -- some rural, some non-rural -- and bridges. We even had a major project assisting a railroad in Cameroon that was being

put together by the French, Italians, and us, called COGEFAR. Art Fell can tell you great stories about this too because he followed me to Cameroon. I tell people that I actually drove the train one time from Yaoundé to Ngaoundéré. I'll get into a taxi or an Uber in Washington and find a Cameroonian driver who is just astounded about how much I know about the country.

At that time the DCM in Chad (Deputy Chief of Mission) was a man named John Blane but his wife Deedee Blane was a USAID employee but on leave to be with John . She was a very good friend who has stayed a good friend. So you would fly to Douala and you'd either overnight or not, and then get up to Yaoundé. But to go up to Chad, you'd get on this plane and you'd have French pilots. Those planes, they didn't have any kind of signature, you didn't know what airline you were on, you didn't know anything. It was always an adventure. It was definitely an adventure.

Q: There was not Air Afrique yet?

BLOOM: No, definitely not Air Afrique. But you'd fly up and you'd stop in a town like Maroua or Garoua. Everyone on the plane would get off, including the pilot. You'd go into this dusty little airport and have a seven-course French lunch with wine, then get back on the airplane. There was no direct flight from Yaoundé to then Fort-Lamy, now called N'Djamena. So it was all just amazing. I never questioned anything. Most of the projects we were doing made sense and others didn't because we didn't really know what we were doing at the time. It was all so new. No donor knew what to do.

One of the more interesting trips I took in the course of the two years I spent traveling around West Africa made no sense, but our two Ambassadors, the one in Chad and the one in the Central African Republic (CAR), talked to those Governments about possibly paving a road between those two countries. Which would make no sense whatsoever, at all. So they called WARCDO and said, "Send a Project Development Officer and an engineer. We are going to drive this road as it exists now to do a traffic count, then look at the economics and write up a report. So I went with an engineer -- I can't remember who it was but we had a couple of really good people. And we did a two-day drive. We drove from Fort-Lamy on a dusty dirt road which hardly had the semblance of a path. We didn't even make it to the border of the Central African Republic the first day so we stayed overnight in a town called Fort Archambault at the time.

It was about an hour or two from the CAR border, and we overnighted and then got back in the car. About two hours later, in the middle of nowhere, in the jungle as it were, or amongst trees or whatever, there was what seemed to be a border and we stopped. It looked very unofficial but there were some cars on the other side. A Frenchman came up to our car -- this is literally true -- and said, "Are you Mr. Bloom?" And I said, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" And this is what actually happened. And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, we were sent up by the Ministry of Transport, ten hours, to meet you and escort you back down."

Q: Oh, my goodness.

BLOOM: We actually got in the car and followed them back down another ten hours. I mean, at this border, there wasn't even a town. We got to the Central African Republic which at that time was being run by Bokassa, who designated himself Emperor. People were frightened every time he went out on the street.

Well, if you are going to do a transport project, you probably want to do a traffic count. In two days of traveling, I don't know how far it was, maybe 1200 kilometers, I'm making a guess. All dirt and nothing else, you're in Land Rovers. USAID ultimately went to Land Cruisers which at least had springs and some type of shock absorbers. But Land Rovers, if you rode in them in those years, were like boxes of iron. But you didn't mind it, it was just part of the job. I think that's what attracts a lot of people to USAID. It was adventure and excitement when you're young.

So I think I did a traffic count in two days on less than two hands. I just couldn't understand it. I went to the Ministry of Transport in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, which of course was a mess, and listened and talked, and went back. I think we probably flew back and wrote some kind of report, which of course was totally non-supportive. I could never really understand, to be honest with you, why our Ambassadors would even consider talking to Ministries in those countries about a project that made no sense. I'm not blaming them per se either, because I have no idea what the political imperatives were at the time. But the absurdity of it was obvious.

Q: Yes.

BLOOM: The enjoyment and fun of taking a trip like that was exciting, and in a way I think it's what kept people in USAID. But I traveled all over. I went up to Niamey and with Sarah Jane we did a famous bridge project there which basically developed the other side of the river.

Q: The Malanville bridge or the Niger River bridge?

BLOOM: The Niger River bridge. Sarah Jane was heading the program there. She was a very lively interesting woman who was legendary within the Agency.

We also did some port projects. One thing about being in Abidjan that was interesting and useful was that it was where they established the headquarters of the newly developed African Development Bank (ADB). It was just filled with all sorts of characters who knew nothing about development. But they were selling rugs from their offices, or importing translators from Switzerland for other reasons. I remember this sophisticated Ghanaian guy wearing his fancy suits. But when he knew that Peace Corps Volunteers or students were coming to town, he would put on his Kente cloth and chase those young women all around town.

This is a good part of the story. I don't know if he's going to be interviewed, but Owen Cylke was seconded to the ADB as the first USAID employee. He was there working in

this newly established organization, and he had stories that he should write in a book that would probably be one of the most humorous books written. It would be like the book on East Africa entitled *Black Mischief* by the British humorist Evelyn Waugh. But it was hysterical.

And that's when Art Fell, who became a lifelong friend, who came from a top law firm, besides being a world class jazz pianist, got recruited by USAID. He thought being a lawyer there made no sense and somehow convinced Al Disdier to let him be a Capital Development Officer. He came out to Abidjan with his French wife Teri and replaced Owen in the African Development Bank. We have been friends ever since. They've retired in Montpelier, France. We had a wonderful time together.

In Abidjan, there was one really nice hotel, the Hotel Ivoire, that always had nice music on the rooftop restaurant and also in the main dining room. There was also an ice skating rink and a bowling alley, which was crazy. It's like the Jamaican bobsled team -- the Ivory Coast hockey team. But they couldn't find anyone to play piano music. One time Teri came over to Gretchen and me and said, "Don't tell anyone, but we're going to go over to the dining room." And there Art sat in for three weeks, not telling anybody, but playing the piano, moonlighting. I don't know if he got paid or not, it didn't make any difference. He didn't want a lot of people to know. But it was wonderful. And it was a bonding experience with them. Art would also have some great stories about the African Development Bank, which really gave you a tapestry of what Africa was like at the time. It was very interesting.

In this case I think a lot of the projects did make sense. I also had a lot of responsibility for Liberia. And Liberia at the time actually had the highest re-up of Peace Corps Volunteers of any country. And it was a large program. Going to Liberia was a crazy experience. Again, delightful. The cops looked like American cops. You wouldn't trust one of them.

Q: Were they using dollars?

BLOOM: Yes, they used the U.S. dollar. They had the greasiest falling-apart dollars you could possibly have. We did rural roads and some other projects, and I think staff felt very valued, like Peace Corps Volunteers. I remember we did a hospital, the JFK (John F. Kennedy) Hospital. We got it built but we wouldn't provide operating expenses and it was standing there as a white elephant. Our Ambassador got called in by President Tubman who said, "You've got to provide operating expenses, otherwise it's an embarrassment to you." The Ambassador replied, "We can't do that. We provided the project and it's up to you now. You have to operate it with your own expenses." Weeks went by and it got more and more embarrassing. Then our Ambassador got called back. I saw the cable which the Ambassador wrote, saying, "We have got to do something because, as Tubman said to me, we've got you by the balls, you better do it." That's exactly what happened. But that was Africa at the time.

We did some good projects, like road projects, in Cameroon. We did some good stuff in Liberia. The Niamey Bridge in Niger was a very good project. The railroad in Cameroon clearly made some sense. This was ’70 to ’72. USAID at the time -- John Pielemeier could possibly tell more about this -- was moving more for direct assistance to the poor. It all came out of a Bangladeshi guy at the World Bank who was pushing the concept of development to giving direct assistance to the poor. I think we abandoned capital projects too early because they really did make a lot of sense. .

I spent two years in Abidjan. It seemed enough, there was a lot of traveling, and by that time I guess I said, “Well, maybe this is a career.” Meanwhile, my wife Gretchen was very happy. And we met a lot of Volunteers. One of her fellow Volunteers went on to develop one of the best consulting firms, ARD (Associates in Rural Development) in Burlington, Vermont. That was George Burrill. He sold ARD several years ago for 43 million dollars. That’s a successful Peace Corps Volunteer! Gretchen has a picture of the two of them in a play they did in Togo.

Anyway, after the two years, we felt it was enough. Then I got offered something that was very unusual for USAID, to be able to take the six-month State Department Foreign Service Institute Economics Course. There were maybe 25 State Department Economic Officers and one USAID person.

Q: I’ve also taken that course.

BLOOM: Great. And it was extraordinary. I mean, it was really intense. I think I sort of took it seriously. Maybe it was my DNA, but my head took me back to what it was like at the university and I really worked hard. State Officers were a little bit more casual about it all, but it was really basically like getting something between a BA and a Master’s in economics in six months, really a Berlitz course in economics. And I learned a lot and could take credit for this, but it turned out that I ended up being one of the top two in the course. But that’s not because I was smarter than anybody else, I think I just took it more seriously. My head made me feel like I was back in a university and I ought to work hard.

So I finished the course and, of course, in its usual desultory way, USAID Personnel had no idea what to do with me. They said, “Well, why don’t you go around and find yourself some job in Washington?” At that point we had decided to stay in Washington for a couple of years and we bought our first house.

Q: So was this ’72?

BLOOM: The course was given from the fall of ’72 to January ’73, so we’re talking about early ’73. I worked hard in that course, as I have said, and learned a lot and made a couple of very lifelong friends. I looked around, I was a Capital Development Officer and various Bureaus did capital development. And they said, “Well, go to the Latin America Bureau and interview a guy named Marty D’Agata.” I went to interview him and here was this guy with his feet up on the desk.

The Latin America Bureau was its own special kind of entity at the time. It was a Mafia of sorts. Almost any young person, if they weren't married or formerly a Peace Corps Volunteer, and went to Latin America, probably came home with a Latina spouse. They spoke the language and wanted to stay in the region because it was very accessible to the U.S.. They couldn't understand why you would go to Africa when you could be in Guatemala, or Ecuador or somewhere where you could listen to the Red Sox and fly home and be in the same time zone. Marty D'Agata was a typical Latin America type heading an office in the Bureau. And he had his feet up on the desk.

Q: And was he smoking a cigar?

BLOOM: Yes, smoking a cigar, with his feet up on the desk, and spouting off. And I'm saying to myself, "Why would I work for this guy when I think I know as much as he does? And what is this all about?" And it seemed to me it reflected the Latin America machismo. That was my impression.

So I said, "Hmm." He was willing to offer me a position but I declined, so he said, "Well, why don't you go and see a guy named Ray Love." I did, and that was probably the biggest turning point of my life in USAID, and probably the best thing that ever happened to me in USAID, in terms of my own career and as a human being. I'll go more into the Ray Love story later. And he is still a wonderful friend and one of the best persons that ever, ever occupied any office in the Agency.

But anyway, so I went, and I met Ray Love, in the East Asia Capital Development Office. And there was a trio on top consisting of Ted Lustig, Sy Taubenblatt, and Jim Stevenson. None had ever served overseas, all were running that Capital Development Office, all were sounding like they knew what they were doing. They were a little bit arrogant about all of this. And there was Ray. I started talking to him and he started talking about projects. He talked about Indonesia and he gave me some papers to look at and said, "You can do this, and you can do this, and this, and this, and this." And I took this stuff and went home and said to myself, "Gee, Ray sounds like a really nice person and he's really substantive." I went back to him in the next day or two and said, "I'd be happy to work in your office under you."

I was in that office for a couple, three years. When you're in USAID Washington, it isn't as exciting but we had a reason to be staying in USAID Washington, because we had decided we wanted to have kids and needed some good medical assistance. That all worked out and we ended up with two great kids.

Ray was terrific and he deflected the bigger bosses. But what always puzzled me was that all projects have to come back to USAID/Washington for review. So here you have all these people in the field and they're doing project papers, and they come in and you sit around and you've got Ted Lustig and Sy and they're beating up on people like Ray Van Raalte, and I was not understanding all that, but I was doing what I could. I wondered, "Why is it that all of these people in the field must come in and get beat up? Then they're back in Washington and the former staff in Washington are in the field and the opposite

happens." That never made any sense. And this will segue into a later story about the Asia Experiment and delegations to the field.

Ray couldn't have been nicer. He gave me two long summers in Indonesia to fill in for staff who were on leave. One was Ray Van Raalte and another was Dennis Brennan. Both were good professionals. So I had good TDYs (Temporary Duty). And he made it as exciting as it could be.

Well, after a couple of years I started really wondering, where was I going with this. It was not so exciting in Washington although we liked living there. Then I got a call from the person who headed the Foreign Service Institute Economics Course, a man named John Sprott. And he said, "We have had a call from Senator Javits' office. They are looking for someone to be on his Committee. Are you interested?" Well, it sounded extremely exciting. Javits at the time was considered the brightest man in the Senate and he probably was. If only we had the likes of Jake Javits today. So I went and interviewed four top Senators, two from each party, including Javits. They offered me a job to be on the Foreign Policy and Economics Committee. The job was to be Javits' person on economics and foreign policy.

So I went to Ray and I said, "Ray, I've got some news." He said, "You're going to go to the Latin America Bureau." I said, "No, Ray, I'm not." Well, what happened, and this is fortuitous, is that I was offered the job, I told USAID I was going to leave, but it turned out that Congress wouldn't provide funding for the position, so I didn't go to the Hill. I'm really glad, because it wouldn't have been my métier. It would not have been good for me.
In retrospect, I couldn't have been happier. Many, many better things happened and we can go into that later. But I was not a policy person per se and I would not have liked the atmosphere of the Hill and the pressure.

So I came back to USAID and was still in a dilemma. Then it was about '76, so I had been in that office for about three years. By that time we had our first child, but we were still staying in Washington. And this is instructive, I think, because everybody in their USAID career at some point wonders, "Do I really want to make this a career? What would I do if I didn't?" So I said, "You know what, I think I better re-establish my legal credentials."

By the way, I did not have a strong appreciation of what lawyers did in USAID/Washington or as Regional Legal Advisors, and I'll get into that in a second. I went to the General Counsel's Office -- at that time it was Chuck Gladson who headed it whom people know about. And they hired me and they put me in the East Asia Office. It was headed by one of the most phenomenal persons that I have met, both as a personal and professional mentor, Herb Morris, who died fairly recently. Herb stayed in DC where he had a distinguished legal career.

Q: General Counsel's Office?

BLOOM: Yes. Herb stayed in the General Counsel's Office in the Asia Bureau for years. He was offered other jobs. Many of the people who came into USAID as lawyers decided that this wasn't where the action was and moved to the project/program side and often became Mission Directors. Art Fell is one. So I went to work for Herb. And Herb was a very bright guy from Yale Law School. But he was also a philosopher of life, and he was a realist about USAID and regulations and handbooks and all. Basically USAID couldn't have had a better person as a lawyer. Because some of the lawyers really were obstructionists, particularly in the Africa Bureau. Herb was the opposite.

We spent a lot of time talking about life and philosophy. But at the same time we were supporting the Project Development Office of the Asia Bureau, which was headed by Ray Love. So I kept my connection with Ray, and Ray understood why I did this. And being a lawyer in USAID/W wasn't terribly interesting. Actually I spent more of my efforts, I think, rather than being a lawyer in USAID, working with Ray and that staff on projects and trying to help where I could.

Herb could clearly have risen to the very top, he could have been a Mission Director, but his wife Michelle was heading the French department at Georgetown and he didn't want to go overseas. But being around him for a year and a half was a very rewarding experience about life, and very enriching. To give you an example of how honest and good Herb was, he was on the committee that would interview new lawyers who prospectively wanted to work in USAID. He would talk to them and question them and ask them, "Do you really want to be a lawyer? Do you like law work? Do you like legal work?" And to the extent that they were really positive, he said, "Well, this isn't the Agency for you." He was that honest. It's really true. I saw it happen.

After about a year and a half, Gretchen and I were vacationing in Nantucket when I got a call from Ray Love. I'll go into it more, but Ray became my mentor for my life, and did so many good things for me. He was one of the most modest, brightest, warmest, humane persons to rise to a high position that you could have ever found in any institution whether corporate or government. But anyway, I was literally reading a book by V.S. Naipaul about India, and I got this call. Ray would call you day or night, it didn't matter. He was really an expert on the Philippines, even though he hadn't been overseas. He could call you in the middle of the night from the Philippines where he traveled a lot.

He said, "Listen, we're about to re-establish a USAID program in India. How would you like to go out and head the Project Development Office?" And I said, "Ray, what are you talking about? And, by the way, I'm reading this book by Naipaul." And he said, "I'm serious." And I said, "Well, you know I'm working." And he said, "Don't worry about Herb. When you come back, would you be ready to go out there for two or three weeks, or four weeks, along with a woman named Priscilla Boughton?" I'll get to that in a minute. "And talk about re-establishing a program and going out and taking the job?" Well, it blew my mind.

By that time we were about to have our second child – this was the summer and Claire was born in November -- so we were ready to leave Washington. And I thought I'd be

going out as a lawyer somewhere, and that didn't excite me very much. Regional Legal Advisors have a certain amount of work to do and all, but it's not the guts of what you want to do in development. So anyway, Ray said, "Don't worry about it. I'll talk to Herb."

I came back, and this was 1977, and I'll give you a little background on why. Our largest USAID program was India's up until 1971. In 1971, because of the Kissinger tilt to Pakistan, (someone could read about that), and India's support of the Bangladesh War, which produced Bangladesh independence, it was decided that we would break off economic relations with India. Not diplomatic, though. And the USAID Mission went down from something like 500 Foreign Service Nationals to 46 between '71 and '78.

There were incredible buildings and space in the Embassy because of this. Well, what happened was that, in 1977 Mrs. Gandhi got defeated in an election because she had a compulsory sterilization program that was not popular in the country. And they elected this 92-year-old man, Morarji Desai, as Prime Minister, who advocated drinking your own urine for good health. Also Jimmy Carter was President of the United States and his mother had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in India. So the two countries decided we would resume economic relations.

So we flew back from vacation in the fall of '77, and I went out, along with Priscilla Boughton who was head of the South Asia Office. A year later she came out as the Mission Director. We were to put together, as quickly as we could, a kind of program, building on World Bank projects and using USAID documents at the time that were called PIDs (Project Identification Documents). My job was to come back with something like six PIDS building on irrigation programs or health programs -- whatever we could do -- but we needed to get it started. And someone needed to get out there in early 1978.

I was thrilled, and Gretchen was thrilled. At that time we had a three-month- old and a three-year-old. I went out with Priscilla. We had an Embassy that was totally against restarting the USAID program, thinking it would interfere with our relationships with India, except for one person, the Ambassador, Robert Goheen. Goheen had grown up in India, in a missionary family He had been head of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton.

He recognized the benefits of USAID for universities and for development. And so with all the obstacles that everybody in the Embassy threw against us, we won every battle. Priscilla was very shy, but very determined and a very bright person. We actually went out separately on airplanes, we didn't stay in the same hotel, we really didn't eat much together, but we were somehow so in sync and so determined to put this thing together, that we bonded in a really nice way.

Well, when we got to Delhi, I found that we still had an India staff of about 46 who could have run the Mission by themselves. They didn't need us, whether Controllers, Administrative Officers, or Project Officers. They gave me the best secretary anybody

could possibly have, a guy named Raj. I can go into that later, but still, on every one of our birthdays, he writes us a letter or calls, and this is nearly 40 years later. "How is the cute little Claire, the wonderful little Seth, and the beautiful Mrs. Bloom?" This is a heartwarming story and something that comes out of USAID, and there's a famous story I'll go into later about the PD (Project Development) lunch. But anyway, I was able to do that assignment, not necessarily because I was better than anybody else, but I knew the business.

What was really amazing was that no one was offered that job except me, and I have to give Ray all the credit in the world because it became one of the most wonderful assignments and period of our lives. India was fascinating at the time. It still had remnants of the old Raj There were no imports, and there was only one car, the Ambassador. But we were also were going out into a country where there was no program behind us. There was no baggage. The only program that was still going on was some PL480, so there was one American there, period, who dealt with it.

Q: In 1978?

BLOOM: Yes. It was February 1978 when we took a three-month-old and a three- year-old on an airplane, Pan Am. I don't remember the flight, I don't remember what it was like traveling that far with little infants, but it isn't like today, that's for sure. I don't remember stopping or not stopping. I do remember arriving in the middle of the night at the Delhi airport where Pan Am One and Two, the round-the-world Pan Am flights in different directions, crossed.

Q: Oh, really?

BLOOM: And I remember getting off the airplane with these two little infants and about 600 people from these two planes, and one Indian person at Customs. We also had, and John might remember this, a bizarre passport. We did not have Diplomatic Passports, they gave us red-covered passports, called an Official Passport, which nobody understood. Well, that pulled us out of the line and the Indians were trying to figure that one out. And we had these two infants. It sounds like it was overwhelming, but at the time it seemed like this was part of life. And Gretchen was very adaptable. I can't imagine now what it was like. Everyone told us, "You're going to kill your kids -- how can you go to India?" And it is true, in any hospital in India at that time, you wouldn't come out alive, although they had good doctors. Now you could have a heart operation in India.

But in the few weeks that I was there with Priscilla, I was just so intrigued. And this is somewhat relevant, and John knows that, but I looked very much like an Indian even though I have no Indian background. I was taken for Indian 100 percent of the time. And if you saw pictures, or whatever, there was never a question. And people would address me in all sorts of languages. I remember one time in those few weeks when I was in the Ashoka Hotel developing these projects before going on assignment. I was walking down the corridor, and some British guy opened his door, came out, and handed me his

laundry. I said "What the f**** is that?" And that's a true story, and that story got circulated around USAID. He thought I was working at the hotel.

But Priscilla and I really did bond, even though she was a very shy person. It was good because we went out and looked at projects. Rural electrification, that was one of the first major ones. Irrigation, we joined with the World Bank's irrigation projects in several States. But she preferred that I do the talking, and as John knows, I like to talk -- I'm an extrovert. And after about two weeks we were kind of exhausted, in a good way, and we had bonded better. And even though we were staying in separate hotels and eating separately, we would take on the Embassy and she could support me because she was the senior person. Priscilla was an excellent professional who knew what was needed to start a program.

We decided that we ought to get away for a weekend. And where did we end up going? This is good. We went to Khajuraho. Khajuraho is the famous place in India where they have all the exotic temples, with sexual scenes in every sexual position called -- what's the book?

Q: The Kama Sutra?

BLOOM: Yes, the Kama Sutra. And Khajuraho is a fascinating place. One travels around in a kind of a pedal rickshaw. Priscilla and I spent two days there and got to know each other very well and had a number of beers. Here we were in this situation and I was saying to myself, "I am being paid by the U.S. Government to go to this incredibly historic, interesting, intellectual place." I got to know a person whom not a lot of people got to know very well because she was generally introverted and kept things close to herself. But it was good to have bonded because she came out a year later to Delhi as the Mission Director.

The first Mission Director in India was from the Africa Bureau. His name was John Withers. I was permitted, and this is relevant, to choose an assistant for the Project Development Office. We weren't going to be a big Mission. We started off and built up within a year to about 20 Americans. But we had 40 or 50 incredibly talented Foreign Service Nationals in technical areas, and administrative and controller areas, so it didn't matter. I was always a supporter of the IDI (International Development Intern) Program. And I said, "Okay, let me see if I can find an IDI or someone who might fit in and finish the program."

Well, there was this person who came from the Africa Bureau to the Asia Bureau and was starting to work for Ray, who was still heading the Asia Bureau Project Development Office. His name was Jeff Malick. Jeff looked as Indian as I did and he was fluent in Hindi and Nepali because he had spent six years in Nepal with the Peace Corps.

Q: I think he was born in Jamaica.

BLOOM: He was born in Jamaica of Lebanese background. I didn't know much about him and so I said, "Well, I'll just take the chance and bring this guy out." And he wasn't all that experienced but it couldn't have been a better decision. He came out to India early before his family because they were finishing things up, and so he was like an extra parent for our little three-month-old and three-year-old.

We soon had a program going with about 100 million dollars a year. A lot of that was in concert with the World Bank's ongoing projects. Irrigation projects were a big part of the Bank and we piggybacked on them. Rural electrification was a very big project for us. It was something USAID was very involved in, something Ray Love knew a great deal about. He could have been considered the Agency expert in this sector.

Again, this is just one of many thanks I give to Ray Love for giving me an opportunity to go out. But people said, "How can you take two infants to India?" And sure enough, the day after we got there, the kids, Seth and Claire, were going from both ends. This nice Sikh doctor, Mr. Chawla, came to the house and I said, "Oh, house calls." And he said, "Don't worry, the kids will be okay. I'll give them some medicine. The kids were probably sick from traveling. Don't worry: they will be fine." And they were. Although I think Seth probably had bacillary (dysentery) for about a year. He was three years old. But you know what? They survived. And they survived happily.

Q: Oh, gosh.

BLOOM: My only little regret is that, because the kids were so young, they don't have much memory of the wonderful things that happened in the three years that we lived in India. We have wonderful pictures and they think they remember all our stories from them.

Okay, so we got to India with these two infants and my wife, and we woke up the next day to find that we had seven people to help us in our house because no Indian does more than one type of work. We had a full-time nanny, called an *ayah*, for Claire. We had a full time young Indian (Gopal) who said he wasn't a cook but he turned out to be the best cook in Delhi. We had a gardener, we had a person who came three or four times a week called a *dhobi* who did our ironing, and so on. Gretchen said, "What am I going to do?" Well, it turned out that she went to Nehru University for three years and got a Master's in Sociology and an M.Phil. (Master's of Philosophy) in Social Medicine and Community Health.

Q: Was that in Delhi?

BLOOM: Yes, it was in Delhi. It was a new university trying to attract professors back who were at some good universities in the U.S. or the U.K. to do an interdisciplinary graduate type program. And they were successful. Very leftist, by the way. Kind of Marxist. Well, the professors were more our age and became friends and her fellow students were probably 17 or 18. We were in our 30s. So Gretchen got two degrees at

$25.00 a semester while raising two infants (with lots of help). And she never cooked a meal for three years. It was a fabulous experience!

Q: Peter, tell us a little bit about it. Did you get to know Indians, did you get to know them personally and become friends? How did that work out?

BLOOM: We had wonderful friends in India. And to this day we have some of those same friends. I said at the time that I probably wouldn't want to do this, but if someone said I had to live there for 20 years, I could have done it happily. Because we had friends as well versed in many areas and with values as in the U.S. The Delhi School of Economics was as good as MIT. Half of our friends were Indian and were very sophisticated in every aspect of life and interested in dance, music, culture and so on. I'll give you one good example. About four or five years ago, we went back for the wedding of the son of some good friends – an Indian man married to an American woman, who met each other in Berkeley -- whose son had been two years old when we left in 1981. He was a Sikh, and we went back because you don't miss an Indian wedding. We joined in the classical Indian wedding with five days of festivities. So our relationships were fantastic with Indians.

I had my 40th birthday in India and Gretchen arranged for a Rajasthani band. Rajasthan is one of the States in India with a particular kind of music. Our lawn was covered with Rajasthani carpets and awnings were put up called *shamianas.* Gretchen arranged for roast suckling pigs being made by the Indian army out back. Half of the guests who came to the party were Indians. Jeff Malick led the group who all wore black armbands because I was turning 40. And it was a phenomenal place to be. We had many Indian friends, even on the street where we lived. And in fact the seven people who worked for us were all living in the garage behind our house and it was like an extended family. They had a television set and we didn't. I think there is something salutary, frankly, about the fact that our kids were handled by not just a nuclear family, two parents, but were picked up and tossed around, and dealt with by all sorts of people.

John Withers was the first Mission Director. The irony is, John, that he looked Indian (like a Tamil) because he was African American and was dark. Jeff and I also looked Indian, as I have mentioned, so we had these three people in the USAID Mission and nobody could figure out who the Americans were. But half of the people who came have stayed friends.. So the social life in terms of music, dance, theater, and sports -- tennis, squash, and so on – was great. I really felt I could have lived there for many years. It would be much more difficult now with the extreme pollution, traffic and a city of 15 million instead of the one million at that time.

Q: This is where you perfected your squash game?

BLOOM: That came with the next tour in Kenya. But I do play a lot of squash.

Q: How did you grow the program? You said it was very small, just PL-480. What happened? What did you do with the program?

BLOOM: Well, what we did initially, as I said, was to try to build onto the World Bank projects, such as on irrigation projects in several of the States. India is a Federal system like the U.S. And it probably answers your question because you socialize and relate to Indians on all the projects in the State Ministries. It was a Federal system set up by Nehru so subject areas like irrigation or health or forestry were all State subjects. So you basically flew to the States and were picked up by the Ministry that you were working with.

I remember my first trip to Rajasthan. We got picked up by officials from the Ministry of Irrigation and stayed for a week or ten days in the Irrigation Rest House, and ate Indian food. By the end of the first week we were getting up in the morning at 5 am with them and doing a *puja* (prayer) by going to a temple and holding hands, and we chewed *paan,* which is what Indians do. It's a betel leaf with nuts and some red stuff *(katha)* inside of it, chewed after every meal for digestion. And you integrated. You were not the USAID persons driving in separate cars.

And since there was only one make of car in India at the time, the Ambassador, which was the old 52 Morris which the Indians had bought from the British, that was your vehicle. It was wonderful. It certainly had no air-conditioning and India got very hot. It was very comfortable and anybody could fix it with chicken wire and gum or something. I went thousands of kilometers in many States in India, but always with the Indian Ministry.

And in fact, one time, I remember we were doing a health project. I'll get to how the program built up, but we were going to do a health project in Maharashtra and the Ministry so much wanted us to see one of their most historic sites that they went something like 150 kilometers out of their way to show us the Ajanta Ellora caves which have these centuries old paintings. They are very proud of their culture, whether they're health people or engineers or whatever. They know it, they know their gods, they know their religion. You learned an awful lot but you were in their hands. And I found that to be very rewarding. I liked all of my assignments, but I have to say that this was one of the best. And I loved Sri Lanka too, but for a different reason. But India was exceptional for the reason that you really did integrate and became part of the culture.

Q: So did they suggest the project ideas?

BLOOM: I think that it was a combination. At first we were new and therefore had to create relationships with the Foreign Ministry. And luckily enough, there was a wonderful man named Mr. Kao. We got to know each other but it took a while because the Indians had always been suspicious of the U.S. There had been historic tensions between the USG and the Indian Government both economically and politically. But we said, "Well, we can help in areas, we have American land grant universities that had been there in the '50s. We had done a lot to help India develop its agricultural programs." And for once the Indians gave the U.S. credit for basically establishing the whole system of

land grant type programs where you have extension officers relating to universities, relating to research.

It was a dramatic shift in the approach to agricultural development because the British had separated out research and extension. In the ‘50s we had universities out there working to put them together. And the Indians bought into that approach.

Q: And the Green Revolution.

BLOOM: And the Green Revolution, of course, with miracle rice developed at IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) and wheat developed at CIMMYT (International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center). And so I think we looked for areas that would be easy for us to join. And irrigation was, of course, a huge subject. And then health was a big subject. Later forestry became a significant part of the portfolio. We looked for ways to have an impact. Maybe we weren’t the major funder of sectors, but we participated in many and slowly we built up a portfolio. But one could spend endless money on an irrigation program. You can imagine the size of the States and the needs. At the time, one State, Uttar Pradesh, had 120 million people.

It probably wasn’t so bad that I had spent a little time with the General Counsel’s Office because we had to negotiate the first project agreements. And there wasn’t a lawyer out there, and the Regional Lawyer was in Pakistan and I said, I think it was to John Gunning, “Listen, this isn’t rocket science. First of all, these pieces of paper are probably not worth the paper they’re written on because nobody is going to sue anybody under a USAID project agreement.” And I’m not being cynical. I mean, granted, we were in loan agreements, but nobody has ever enforced any one of these against the other party. But you needed to go through the formal process, and I ended up negotiating agreements because the Mission had enough trust in me with my GC background.

And Herb Morris, whose office I had left, said to me, “Listen, you know the business. We wrote the handbooks, this is not like coming from the tabernacles, we can undo these regulations. Do the right thing. Do what you think makes sense. And if you think you’re going to get a ‘no’ answer, and you really want to do something, don’t come back to USAID/W and ask. Don’t come back to my office in Washington DC and ask. Just do it and write a memorandum that would stand up, as to why you did it. And the chances of the GAO (Government Accountability Office) or anybody ever doing anything would be next to zero.” And nothing ever did happen.

I know I did things USAID/W would have rejected like Conditions Precedent, which I waived even though I didn’t have the authority to do so. But otherwise it would have gone up to the USAID Administrator and that seemed both counterproductive and embarrassing. In the end it didn’t matter because I had such good mentors, like Herb who was realistic, and Ray who also was realistic. In my own way I guess I was sort of entrepreneurial within the system. I wanted to do what would work. I didn’t want to send something to the Administrator of USAID who would have to say ‘no’ to something that

would embarrass the Indians. So rather than do that, I just wrote a memorandum as to why.

Q: Right. You mentioned Conditions Precedent. Did you have Program Assistance?

BLOOM: Yes. The Program Office also was established and I headed the Project Development Office with Jeff, in which we had three very good Indians including an engineer. And then the person who came out to head the Program Office was John Westley. Oh no, John came out as the Economist. It was John Gunning who headed the Program Office.

John Westley came out, I think a year after me, as the Economist. We had very good staff. We absolutely didn't need a Controller but we got one and he was a good guy. But the Indian Controller was absolutely as good. And basically these FSN professionals, when they retired, went and did TDYs all over the world in other USAID Missions.

Q: I was asking whether these were all Project Assistance or did you do some Program Assistance or Commodity Assistance?

BLOOM: These were projects -- we did mostly all projects. We had PL-480 Title 2 and a PL-480 Office. Yes.

Q: Did you have local currency too?

BLOOM: Yes, okay, that's a good question, John, because we had continued the PL-480 program between '72 and '78 when the regular program was suspended. We permitted the Indians to pay us back in local currency, not dollars. And we built up an account in the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of rupees, if not more.

Q: Of rupees?

BLOOM: Of rupees. And at one point, I can't remember the exact dates, you might. It was when Daniel Patrick Moynihan was the Ambassador to India. He decided to turn it all back to the Indians, because what good was it doing us? But we kept a bunch of local currency and we did some local projects with these funds. In fact, I remember two specific hospital projects we did with local currency.

One was in Bangalore. Everyone hears about Bangalore as this high-tech Silicon Valley. At that time, Bangalore was a little town with no two-story buildings but great avocados and mangoes. We were building a hospital, St. John's. And we did it all with local currency so it didn't really cost us anything. I remember going to the Bangalore Club, a place where a woman couldn't go into the bar room. But there was a bounced check of Winston Churchill. Winston Churchill had an assignment in Bangalore as part of whatever the Raj was supporting and so there was a lot of history in this. And I actually flew in a plane, one time, when Rajiv Gandhi was the pilot because he was a pilot before his mother got assassinated and then he became Prime Minister. I flew in a plane one

time to Madhya Pradesh with Rajiv as the pilot and it didn't mean anything to me, but that was a fact of life.

I'm glad you reminded me. We did have a PL-480 Office. I don't know if you know Jane Nandy who used to live around you -- she was in that office. And I can't remember who else. And we did some projects, some local projects. But most of the program was irrigation -- assisting building small dams, mostly canals, and irrigation management – as well as agricultural research, health and population planning.

BLOOM: We had some terrific people, really top rate. Fletcher Riggs was a person I remember, one of the best Agricultural Officers I ever worked with. These were extraordinary people but you had to have extraordinary people because the Indians were extraordinary. This was a whole different world of working, and they were every bit as educated and smart and as capable as we were, and in a way, I think it helped boost things along.

Q: So the loan and grant agreements, project signatures and project approvals, was that at the State level usually, or at the Federal level?

BLOOM: It was at the Federal level, but it was for the State. But you worked with the State Ministries always, in fact, definitely with the Irrigation Ministries in Gujarat and in Rajasthan.

I'll tell you a good story. It's a good Jeff Malick and me story, because he sometimes traveled with me. Gujarat was a dry state (meaning there was no alcohol consumption allowed). And you'd be driving hundreds of kilometers on dusty roads, and at the end of the trip, drinking water was not the smartest thing to do in India. Although there were times I did drink water because I didn't have a choice. But they knew we would want a beer. Not that the beer was so great but it wasn't so bad either.

I remember Jeff and I took one trip and we weren't thinking a lot about that. The only way you could get alcohol is if you got a certificate that you were an alcoholic. So the Gujarat Irrigation Department got a doctor to write a certificate that certified that Jeff Malick and Peter Bloom were alcoholics. We could take that to a bar in our hotel and give it to them and get a beer. To this day, I wish I'd kept that certificate! Jeff knew that story very, very well, and it's a wonderful story. But again, it's why did we loved what we did, beyond the substance of what we were doing, because all that happened to you was quite extraordinary.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: And that one was quite extraordinary. In fact, when Morarji Desai came in as Prime Minister, he made Delhi dry, which it had not been. The only people who could drink were expatriates in hotels. Indians couldn't drink in hotels. And we would go out, I'd go with Gretchen and some friends, and the waiter would come around and we'd say, "I'll have a beer, I'll have a beer." And he'd get to me and say, "Sorry sir, we can't serve

you." I said, "Excuse me?" They said, "We can't serve Indians." I said, "I'm not Indian." Then he said again, "I'm sorry sir, we can't serve you." This went on and on. And Jeff kept telling them that I was Indian!

Q: How did you prove it?

BLOOM: Finally I took my passport when I went out to places. But I'll give you another good story because I think it's worth it and because Jeff was so good at the language and looked as Indian as I did, if not more so. We went over to our major Ministry counterpart, one office in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, which is their basic Finance Ministry. It is a beautiful building. Jeff and I went to a meeting there one day. He was good at speaking Hindi or English with an Indian accent too. We were sitting there, waiting, when someone said, "Where are the USAID people?" And Jeff started in Hindi and said, "You know, we're very busy people, where are the USAID people, we can't stay here forever." But he could do this in Hindi, and he could do a better accent in Indian English than I could too.

Then Jeff said, "Where are these people? We are busy men, we are going somewhere else. We are not staying here." "No, no, no, USAID is coming with money, you please sit." And then, after a pause, he said, "Actually, are you looking for the people from USAID? Mr. Bloom is from USAID." "You're Mr. Bloom?" the official from the Ministry said. I said, "Are you expecting someone 6' 2", with blond hair and blue eyes?"

But we were taken for Indians. Jeff and I would get into a taxi and tell the taxi driver in Hindi, "Drive us to Bombay." The guy would look and say, "What?" And Jeff would go on. We had so many wonderful experiences. It was a plus because I was anonymous when I would go downtown or to Connaught Place and nobody was ripping me off or I could go to Old Delhi with Gretchen and no one would bother us because I was seen as her tout. And maybe that's why India had, and has to this day, a special attraction for me. And I really felt it and it was a plus.

Also, I developed a wonderful relationship with my counterpart in the Finance Ministry, Mr. Kao. Here's how it happened. We were walking around with our kids one Saturday -- Seth was about five years old and Claire was two. The Rashtrapati Bhavan was a beautiful old building in the main part of New Delhi. It was a Saturday and I decided to see if Mr. Kao was in. Our relationship wasn't a conflictual one but it wasn't necessarily a close relationship. But he was my principal counterpart. And he was in, and so I came up with the kids and Gretchen and introduced them. And the relationship turned like that.

Mr. Kao just couldn't have become warmer. He had little models for trains and trucks that the kids loved. He could do origami models with paper. And from that day on, maybe once a week or once every two weeks, he would stop by our house just to come in, see the kids, and say hello. And I would go to his place, and it was the family bonding. It was just inspirational, kind of like sharing.

Q: How wonderful.

BLOOM: Indians are very warm, in that sense, and very personal. It just made for a wonderful relationship. And everything was kind of easy and less suspicious. And it was nice working on new programs. We didn't have pipelines and the pressure to spend new funds. I spent only three years in Delhi, I would have loved to have spent my fourth year, but I got serious asthma which I hadn't had since a kid. One time I was in the hospital seven times in two months. But the hospital happened to be in the Embassy.

And here's why. When we stopped the economic aid program there was a lot of space in that Embassy and in other buildings. Well, the Viet Nam War wound down in '75, and the USG was looking for a place to put medical equipment and establish a regional hospital, and they created a 10-bed hospital in the Embassy in Delhi.

Q: No kidding.

BLOOM: So every time I had an asthma attack in the evening, the next morning I'd go in and they'd give me a shot of adrenalin, and I'd go to bed, and they'd rehydrate me. Then I could go to work -- the USAID office was upstairs. I really didn't want to leave India.

Q: Basically it was the air pollution causing it?

BLOOM: Yes, and the pollution there was infinitesimally small compared to today. Delhi is worse now than Beijing. I couldn't live there now. The size of the city is also ten times the size.

But here's another nice thing that happened. I was home on home leave after two years, and Claire and Seth were two and five. We were with my sister Ellen and her youngest son Michael who was about to start his junior year in high school. Michael was playing with the kids. And I was saying, "Well, that's great." And I started to tease him, saying "Hey Mike, why don't you come to India?" Not that we needed anybody to help with the kids as we had seven servants. About three days later he said, "Are you serious, Uncle Peter?" And I said, "Sure, why not?" He could enroll in a very good American school which Seth attended. It's called the American Embassy School, but it was definitely an international school.

And we had a wonderful experience because Michael took us up on our offer and came to India. My sister's other kids were in college and she was about to go back and get a Master's in her 40's. And Michael came out at 16, and for one year we had a five-year-old, a two-year-old, and a 16-year-old. And they bonded. It was wonderful and to this day their relationship is still like seeing a two-year-old, a five-year-old and a 16-year-old together, even though they are 40, 43, and 55. And it was great for us. It took Michael a couple of months to adjust and he adjusted ultimately really well. He led a group up to the Kulu Manali Valley afterward and for him it was a very salient part of his life. And for us it was very meaningful.

Sometime within my third year, I got a call from the Mission Director in Kenya, Allison Herrick. I was still heading the Project Office in Delhi and enjoying myself a lot. And she said, "How would you like to come to Nairobi and be my Deputy?" And without thinking, and this is typically me, I said, "Allison, why would I do that? I really like what I'm doing here and I want to stay in India." And I didn't think about it at all.

Ray Love, by that time, had his first and only overseas assignment as Director of the East Africa Regional Development Office. At that time it was no longer just for capital development. It was supporting Missions with all sorts of skills -- population, forestry, environment, energy, and so on -- that Missions didn't have. And I'm sure that Ray talked to Allison and said, "Here's a good candidate." But I didn't give it a night's thought and then people said, "Peter, this is a career thing." And I said, "Yeah, so? Whatever." Well, it became pretty clear by '81, late in the spring, that I couldn't stay in Delhi for another year.

Q: The asthma?

BLOOM: The asthma was too much. And in fact, I became the poster child. You could no longer get a medical clearance if you had asthma after my experience. And now you'd be crazy to go to Delhi with asthma.

So I wrote a letter to Ray saying, "Ray, I'm not going to be able to stay here. Do you have any thoughts or ideas?" And I was very close to his wife Mary also. Mary is a legend in her own right whom I liked, and boy, did she have Ray's back. If she liked you and you liked Ray, you had the Praetorian guard, you had the British Empire, behind you. And I sent a letter to Nairobi. It turned out that Ray was in Washington looking for a new Deputy for the East Africa Regional Office. And he was about to offer the job to somebody. In fact, I know the somebody -- it was Paul Gaudet. And Mary opened the letter, called Ray, and said, "Ray, Peter's going to be leaving India, so how about him?" He said, "Absolutely."

And the next thing I knew I got a call back from Ray and he said "When can you get out here?" And I said, "Well, I've got to finish up for a few months." He said, "I don't care." And again, here is Ray Love, leading me into my next great adventure which was to go and be Deputy in a Kenya office. But it was literally because Mary opened the letter. Mary knew me well. And Ray said that the next day he was about to offer the job to somebody else.

Q: Were you in the Senior Foreign Service by this point? You weren't in a bidding system, it doesn't sound like.

BLOOM: You know, that's a good question. I became a Counselor in 1981, just about that time. I don't exactly remember, but it was '81, which was the first year we could do that. So I would have stayed in India but for my health. I did stay that year. It really was okay, and I wanted to make sure that Michael finished the school year.

And then we did a direct transfer to Nairobi early in the summer of 1981. It was interesting because the nurse who had been in the office in Delhi and knew my problems, when I showed up in Nairobi, asked "What are you doing here? How did you get medical clearance to come here? We couldn't give you medical clearance. We're at an altitude of 6000 feet, and you have asthma?" I said, "Nobody asked, and I'm here." To finish that story on a good note, I think in the first week or two, I had one more attack, from something left over, and have never had an asthma attack since for the rest of my life.

Q: That's wonderful.

BLOOM: And again, it's just Ray Love. It was Ray Love hiring me, doing this, getting me to India, it's Ray Love getting me to be his Deputy, and I remember finally when I did arrive, he had his door shut and it was the season when you had to write evaluation reports, which all of us know and hated in USAID. The EERs (Employee Evaluation Reports) would consume all your time. Ray, who had to write many EERs, just put a notice up on his board that said, "Don't talk to me, talk to Peter Bloom." I didn't know anything.

Q: This is John Pielemeier on the 5th of March. It is the second interview with Peter Bloom. We had talked extensively about Peter's tour and time in India, but he has a few more anecdotes he'd like to add, and then we'll move on to his next posting.

BLOOM: Okay, thank you John. These are anecdotes, but they are an important part of my life and they also impact another Mission that I went to later. One anecdote is about cricket. I can't live in a country without knowing what the national sport is all about, and there is no American that can understand cricket. So basically, my colleague Jeff Malick, whom I mentioned, and I bought tickets for two test matches. A test match is between certain major countries, there are about ten of them, and they last five days. They are seven hours a day with a break for lunch and tea.

So, I saw India play Pakistan at one time, and I saw them play the West Indies. I stayed for one day, along with an Indian staff member from the USAID Mission, the Chief Auditor, Mr. Wahi, who had himself been a player at the test level. And I sat there for seven hours and really learned the game.

Jeff went the next day with an Indian colleague, and then we gave the Indian staff the tickets for the other three days. And did I ever learn my cricket. In every sand lot in India you could see cricket. In fact, our son, when he was three years old, got a cricket set because, rather than buying a baseball or a little whiffle ball, I bought a little cricket set and he learned to play in our little back yard, And I got ensconced and now understand cricket. I'm probably one of the few Americans who does, and it has served me very, very well in many instances in my life.

A second anecdote happened weekly in the Mission. We were the Project Development Office and the Indian staff brought their lunch. We had about five professionals and two support staff and they brought their wonderful Indian food. But once a week Jeff and I

decided we would have what became known as PD (Project Development) lunch. We would spread newspaper on the table, we shared all their food, and ate with our hands and our fingers. One of our wives, either Sue Malick or Gretchen Bloom, made chocolate chip cookies or brownies. And at the end of all that, Dr. Deitch, who was in our office, even though he was running a health program, would go in front of the Ashoka Hotel and get 20 *paan*. I mentioned earlier that those were nuts wrapped in betel leaves coated with lime and other pastes, maybe with tobacco, chewed by many Indians after a heavy meal. And this little *paan* seller could never figure out what this guy who drove up in a Mercedes Benz was going to do with 20 *paan!*

Well, PD lunch became so legendary that it got written up in *Frontlines* and other people always wanted in. But it's a good example of how to integrate with your Foreign Service National staff. In India it was very easy, and you really cared, and the food was really very good. The photo in *Frontlines* shows a picture of Jeff and Raj. We had one of the best secretaries. a man named Raj. In those days, you didn't have word processing, you didn't have computers. Raj could take dictation for two hours. There's also a picture of PD lunch in a *Frontlines* somewhere and I have a copy of it.

I mentioned one thing about Raj but I'll repeat it here because it is still so heartwarming.. Ever since we left India in 1981, my wife and I have gotten a letter from him on our birthdays, in September, saying "How is the cute little Claire? How is the wonderful little Seth? How is the beautiful Mrs. Bloom?" We're concerned only that, when we don't hear, that might mean that Raj isn't still there. But now he calls us on his cell phone for these birthday wishes.

I did talk about how much you're in the hands of the Ministries when you are working in India. We went into what was a new field, called Social Forestry. We picked a State and the World Bank had a State. We had Madhya Pradesh. Social Forestry simply means planting trees on common lands like banks of irrigation canals. So we were in Madhya Pradesh and I had a consultant team with a top forester from the University of Wisconsin, and others, including a Muslim woman anthropologist whom we ultimately brought on to USAID, Zarina Bhatty, who became very well-known as it turned out. She spent ten years in USAID, and it was the first time this had happened. We wanted to understand who was using the forest products, and in this case women were, to a large extent, because they used the products for medicine, for food, for firewood, and some for building. Gretchen also joined on the trip to MP.

We went to MP, we got picked up by the Forestry Ministry, and we stayed in their guest house. They woke us up the next morning at 5:00 a.m. with bed tea, then put us on the backs of elephants, and soon we were thrashing through the jungle forest hunting for tigers, in theory, just as if we were in the period of the Raj. And while we didn't see a tiger, we felt that we would every time we crashed through a tree or a bush. But it was just an example of how the Indian Ministries wanted you to feel the sense of their culture, and also the era, the period. It was really the end of the Raj, with no imports yet, only one make of car, before the 'World Is Flat', as Thomas Friedman has warned about in his book.. So that was terrific.

And the last anecdote is that we were lucky enough at the time to be able to go up to Kashmir every fall. It was bucolic and one of the most beautiful places imaginable. We stayed in a houseboat attached to Lake Dal. You could be out on the lake but since our kids were little, two and five, we basically stayed in one attached to the land. And we often went up with other families, to stay with apple orchards and flowers and trees all around. It was Kashmir as you can envision it and it was just beautiful, The memories are wonderful. So those were the memories I wanted to add about the Indian experience.

Q: Good, wonderful, great. Those are very nice. Let's move on to your mid-tour transfer to Kenya.

BLOOM: I moved to the Regional Economic Development Support Office (REDSO) in Kenya. I don't remember whether we, in the last interview, talked about how I got the job, but there's a question.

Q: Yes, I think you did talk about it.

BLOOM: Basically it was again my mentor, Ray Love, who was looking for a Deputy, and by sheer chance I had to leave India, and it was a confluence of events, and we ended up there. So REDSO was and is a support office for all the Missions in East and Southern Africa. I was the Deputy Director and in my first year Ray Love was the Director. Essentially, it had a type of staffing that not every Mission could have or could even supplement some of the Missions. So we had Project Development Officers, about four or five, we had Regional Lawyers, the Regional Contract Officers, and engineers, we had the Food For Peace Officer, we had the Energy Officer, the Environment Officer, and the Population Officer.

So there was a staff of about 30 professionals, most of them Americans. And their job was essentially to go out and support Missions that requested those kinds of skills. Either they didn't have them at all, or they needed some supplement, often on the Project Development side. And so if anybody signed up for REDSO, they knew they were on a travel program. And you really had to be interested, and willing, and want to spend at least 50 percent of your time away from home and away from post. But the REDSO staff liked it.

Since I was in management, I personally spent about 15 percent of my time traveling around, so I wasn't caught up in that kind of situation. But the other staff liked it because, I think, they felt like they were really individuals on their own with their own bosses, and they were really there to help.

And in terms of management, Ray Love could not have been better. First of all, in terms of his views of development, what should be done, how it should be done, and how a support office should act. Ray had enormous respect from all the Missions in East and Southern Africa. They actually invited him down for policy and program reviews which

is a credit to him because that wasn't always the case with either the Directors of REDSO West or REDSO East.

But when he'd send someone out to a Mission, he'd say, "You do your work, you do your job, you provide the best advice you can, you work with the Mission and you try to convince them if you have different views. But at the end of the day, it's their program. And I will support you two percent of the time!" Which was, in my mind, a great message saying, "Listen, do the best you can."

And staff who came to REDSO, I think to a person, actually really enjoyed that experience. From a management point of view, Ray was kind of hands off, but an advice giver or whatever you want to call it. You could talk over your ideas. Also, papers would come in written by both the Mission and REDSO staff, and we would review them and help and have some input.

We had a nice little addition, and people may remember and know the name, Deedee Blane. She became one of our Project Development Officers but she was living in Rwanda because her husband was the Ambassador to Rwanda. Deedee went around to posts and came to Nairobi and did whatever she could. She also became our first Mission Director in Albania and learned the language fluently. It was quite extraordinary and she was a nice woman and a nice addition to REDSO. It was a very, very good staff.

Q: What year would this be?

BLOOM: That would be mid-1981 to mid-1984. Somewhere after mid-1982 Ray went back to Washington, and out came John Koehring. John was an Africa expert, but John was a very stern looking man, very Germanic looking, with a bow tie. To some people he was a little forbidding, and they weren't as willing to engage with him. But when you got to know John, you realized that he really had a much softer heart and that he really was open to ideas. Even though he sounded like he was dictatorial and authoritarian, that really wasn't the case. It took us a little while to understand this. But it worked out fine and there was one thing very clear, that John really did have a love for Africa. He had been in Cameroon, I think, at one time, along with Art Fell. So I think in that period REDSO worked very, very well.

I'll talk about two or three trips that I took because I thought they were interesting. First of all, one Mission that we gave a lot of support to was Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe became independent in 1980. And I got to REDSO in 1981. But we were, at that time, having to continually send people down to help build up the Mission, and I went down on a couple of trips. At that point Harare looked like Europe. It was probably the most unique type of country in Africa, except for South Africa, at the time. And at the time, Mugabe, who was President, was actually doing a very good job. He was a fiscal conservative but a social liberal. We all know what the history of Zimbabwe has become, but during the years there, it was very well run and well managed. When you went to Harare and got off the plane, you just thought, "I'm not in Africa any longer." And it was amazing, both in terms of infrastructure, the road systems.

It was a very interesting trip and I think we had a good influence both from USAID's point of view in Zimbabwe, and from our support in helping the Mission get going, which is really the point of REDSO, and it was probably the most important.

I remember going down to Victoria Falls and staying in the old Victoria Falls Hotel which the British probably built, and seeing Victoria Falls which is on both sides of Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Another kind of interesting professional trip I took was to the first International Development Conference (IDC) for the Comoros. And nobody knew what the Comoros were, where they were, or what it was all about. There are four tiny little islands off the East Coast, somewhere south of Madagascar and Mauritius. It was probably the least developed place I'd ever been to in my entire life.

Q: Really?

BLOOM: Absolutely, without question. There was one flight a week from Nairobi, and so, even though the IDC was going to be only for a day and a half, there wasn't a whole lot of choice. In a crazy way it was fascinating because essentially the country was being run by South African mercenaries. You saw them walking around with things bulging out of their pockets. The various donors and people who were there were invited twice to the presidential palace, such as it was, and they'd have colorful costumes and drumming going on. But you would see four or five or six or so very, very large white guys with big bulges, just looking over the crowd. And that continued. There was very little in the Comoros at the time. It couldn't have been more rudimentary as countries go, and not many people knew much about it.

Q: What kind of population and size would you say?

BLOOM: A few hundred thousand maybe, if that.

Q: And were they south Asians, or were they Africans, or neither?

BLOOM: That's a good question, John. It seemed to me that they were sort of a combination of African and Southeast Asian. Like Madagascar, it had an Indonesian influence to it.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: I only went there one time. We didn't even have a program in the Comoros per se, but we wanted to show up at the IDC. And I went because John Koehring was in the United States so I went to represent the U.S. Government. What can I say? There certainly was no TV, I think there was a radio program. I think there was a newspaper of four pages once a week. Beaches weren't really very attractive, composed of black sand. In talking about the Third World, you were talking about the Fourth World. It just was

intriguing for someone who has traveled around, and it's not a place that people know much about. But it still, in its history, continued to get occupied by South African mercenaries, who would fight over and decide who could be President. But again, it was intriguing to be in a place like the Comoros that I would hardly have even called a developing country. It just was very basic. It was hard to figure out what could really be done efficiently; it needed everything in the world. So that was a good trip.

While I was in REDSO, we didn't actually place somebody in Madagascar, but we did afterward. But USAID and REDSO came up with a very good program. Madagascar used to be the Malagasy Republic which was unquestionably the jewel of the French Empire, both in terms of how they spoke French and how they lived. But it had deteriorated enormously, both because of possibly a more Communist type of regime, with infighting, presidents, coups, non-coups, and so on. But there was one thing known about Malagasies or Madagascans or whatever they are called.

Q: Malgache.

BLOOM: Malgache. They probably eat more rice per capita than any people in the world. So somebody came up with a really good idea which was -- why don't we at least fund a liaison between them and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines? And that really became the project. The good part about it was that we didn't need to have a presence there. We funded trips from IRRI to there or from there to IRRI. We just brought together the preeminent organization on rice research into a country where rice was essentially the staple food versus maybe yams in West Africa. And I thought that was a very good idea because it wasn't personnel intensive.

Q: Yes. Very interesting.

BLOOM: Madagascar was really in the depths of poverty. I mean, the political infighting, and the level to which the country sank, meant that they needed everything. So on my trip over there, I said, "What can I bring from Nairobi?" And the unanimous voice was, "Soap." And that really took me aback.

But I said, "Okay," and I ended up buying about 30 or 40 bars of soap and putting them in my suitcase. When handing them out, whether it was to drivers, to a Ministry person, to somebody we worked with, whoever it was, it was probably the best present I could have brought. But it was very surprising to me and if somebody hadn't raised it I would never have thought that soap was needed so desperately.

Madagascar is a substantial country, and certainly in terms of its flora and fauna. a spectacular place to be. But its infrastructure at that time was terrible. The roads were very, very rough, with dirt and stuff but we did travel around. It has a significant population and the basis for development, but it needed everything and people were living a very marginal life. And if you can imagine a country that when asked, "What can I bring you?" the answer is, "Soap," you can imagine what life might have been like.

Q: Oh, wow.

BLOOM: Nairobi was a big change for us as a family. When we went there, our kids were three and six. That's a good thing because they were finally old enough to be able to appreciate being in a different environment. They don't have many memories of India, except what we tell them, and what they see in pictures. But it was a big change because we were going from a country with heat and dust, with temperatures up to 110 degrees in several months. And even though our house in Delhi was air conditioned, the power was off 12 hours a day. And Ministries in India had no air-conditioning and you could tell by late in the afternoon that people were dragging and you could understand why.

But in terms of us in Nairobi, we were at about 5,500 feet. It was beautiful, with blue skies, and steaks which you did not get in India (you got some kind of meat). It was lush and lovely. The International School of Kenya (ISK) was very good with a very mixed community of students. A lot of different organizations for NGOs and the U.N. were headquartered in Nairobi due to its appeal.

I have to be clear that Kenya had a USAID Mission with a full staff. So people in REDSO may have been supporting them. I personally had very, very little to do with Kenyans. However, there was an excellent museum, the Nairobi National Museum. Kenya was a center of paleontology. At that time Richard Leakey was running the museum: he's the son of Louis and Mary Leakey. Louis was one of the most famous paleontologists in the world. This is where they discovered the skeleton of Lucy. Supposedly Lucy was the first person who could have been a humanoid. And to this day you can find the skeleton of Lucy in a museum in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia.
If anyone knows anything about paleontology, the Leakeys were the preeminent people. Richard is their son and he ran the museum.

Q: Did you know him?

BLOOM: We knew him very well because he recruited a lot of the spouses of ex-pats. Not just USAID, but others too. My wife worked there as a docent as did a number of others. He also offered us a very nice opportunity. He chartered a DC-3, and we all flew up to Lake Turkana, which is where he was doing his work. So a bunch of couples from different countries, not just REDSO and not just Americans, spent three days with Richard Leakey looking at sights with him, scratching around in rocks and grounds.

One night we walked out into Lake Turkana with a net and pulled in fish for dinner along with his staff. I only realized the next day as we looked at the shore that there were crocodiles all over the place. And they never told us, or we never would have gone in the water. But it was a very nice outlet for spouses. Also, because the weather in Kenya was very nice, we did an awful lot of outdoor things. Obviously, of course, there were the game parks which were easy enough to drive to. We just made sure we had two extra tires because we were bound to get two flats.

And there was one interesting time when we drove down to Amboseli on the border of Tanzania. Our car just died somewhere on the road coming back. What ended up happening was that I stayed there and was staring into the face of four Masai with spears while Gretchen and the kids hitchhiked out back to Nairobi and came back, in two to three hours. The Masai didn't move and I didn't move.

But it was pretty interesting. What we also learned was that as tourists came by, if they wanted to take pictures of the Masai, which they did of course, they better give them something. We heard a number of stories about tourists taking pictures and not feeling that they had to give a tip or anything, and the Masai just calmly walked over to their car took their spears and punctured their tires. We'd heard that story enough times to really believe it.

Q: Oh, really.

BLOOM: But it was a good atmosphere. It was a period, I think, where there still was a certain amount of poverty and crime, but it wasn't something that would stop you from driving to the game parks or going elsewhere in the region. And that certainly was a wonderful environment for family and kids.

I had one other wonderful trip, the one long trip I took was to Botswana, a fascinating country. We were doing a Rural Sector Grant.

Q: I designed that.

BLOOM: Great. John, you designed the Rural Sector Grant, a very imaginative and interesting project. I went down to help evaluate it. And I spent about three weeks. Maybe John wants to tell you what a Rural Sector Grant is.

Q: No, I'm scared to hear how you evaluated it.

BLOOM: No, we evaluated it fine, but I think it means what it says. It is dealing with different areas, whether health, or agriculture, or irrigation, and trying to put it all together. And I had a couple of exceptional experiences. But the person who was my counterpart was actually working for the Ministry in Gaborone, Botswana, but his salary was topped off by USAID. His name was Bill Jeffers. He had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in Botswana and so, in the course of going around the country, we went to his little house up in a town called Maun, which is out near the Okavango. When we were there, the temperature was 50 degrees Centigrade, you're talking 120 degrees Fahrenheit. No air-conditioning, I was absolutely unprepared for this, it was amazing.

But another aspect -- I think it was involving a health project -- we overnighted out on the Kalahari Desert, and it was probably one of the most beautiful evenings I've ever experienced. When the moon came up, it was enormous. It was as orange as could be, a spectacular sight. I will never see a moon like that again for the rest of my life. And there we were in the Kalahari, and you're saying, "Oh, my God, somebody's paying me to do

this!" And it was a wonderful experience. But also, I think Botswana was then, and has continued to be, a pretty democratic country and functioned fairly well.

Q: I'll just mention that Bill Jeffers was a Peace Corps Volunteer. I hired him when I was working in Botswana in the USAID Mission to be the major advisor for the Rural Sector Grant. And later he joined USAID and was the Mission Director in two different countries, Ghana, and then in Croatia. And had a very, very positive career.

BLOOM: I thought Bill was excellent. In fact, how he got hired by us was that, having seen him there, we brought him to REDSO on a PSC (Personal Services Contract), and he joined REDSO as a PSC Project Development Officer, and converted into being a full time USAID Officer. I thought Bill was one of the best. He was great.

But what was interesting, when we finished those three weeks, and I was heading back to Johannesburg to get an airplane, we decided to visit a place called Sun City. People have to remember that this was a period of apartheid. And what South Africa did was break up the country into lots of little mini places that it called Homelands where you could do things that you couldn't do in what was 'South Africa.' Sun City was in Bophuthatswana. And somebody decided they'd open up what became like a Las Vegas of South Africa. And I said, "Bill, let's just go by this place. It's on the way, you'll drive back and I'll make my way to the airport."

Q: I think it had a Holiday Inn.

BLOOM: I'll mention that too. It had more than that. It had a show like you would find in Las Vegas. I remember the group playing when I was there with Bill was Sha Na Na. We arrived, we couldn't get a room until 5:30 in the morning, but we gambled and we saw this and that, and there were women around. It was a playground for South Africans who couldn't mix with other races, blacks particularly, at home. There was also a lot of gambling and prostitution. Sun City was opened actually by Frank Sinatra who got one million dollars to open it. It was very successful and was booming.

But to go there, it was hard to think that you were in Africa. You're driving through the bush, past little mealie patches, and suddenly it looks like a gate like you're going into National Stadium, and you could be anywhere. It was pretty intriguing in that sense because of the South African restrictions.

There was also a Holiday Inn in Botswana, there was a Holiday Inn in Lesotho, there was a Holiday Inn in Swaziland. And if you got booked in to one of them, you had to leave on weekends because all of those three places were fully booked by South Africans because they all had gambling and prostitution. So, you could be in your room from Monday to Friday only. This is what in some ways made things intriguing and interesting. There was nothing really bad or wrong about any of that -- it just created an interesting place and an interesting life. And as I said, the family was happy in Kenya. I distinctly remember our little daughter graduating from kindergarten and singing the Kenyan national anthem in perfect Swahili.

Q: Oh, wow.

BLOOM: Although today she says she doesn't remember any words. But you would never have known she wasn't fluent at the time. It's a very nice impression to have. I can't say very much about Kenya or Kenyans, and maybe somebody else who is doing this can.

I will say, I recruited my successor for REDSO. We were staying and visiting with them in France, and that was Art Fell, Art and his wife Teri, and I told them about the work. He'd been a West Africa specialist and they were in Francophone Africa for years, as well in Paris in the Sahel Program. I talked him into it, and he said, "Fine." Happily, I found them a nice old British colonial house. Not something USAID would normally approve because those houses weren't big enough for American freezers and other furniture, but USAID agreed. And it was near the French school for their daughter Nadine. So Art succeeded me. Art and Teri said they had a very, very good time. And I'm glad to have done it. It was another way I bonded with Art and Teri over many years.

Q: What was the difference in management style with John Koehring and how did that affect your management style later? What did you learn from him and from Art and Ray Love?

BLOOM: Well, I learned everything from Ray Love starting in 1973, as how to be a mentor, an excellent advisor and a good listener. He was a smart and wise person who knew when to inject and not, who was not a micro-manager. He certainly was not a control freak, in any sense. And he gave you your freedom. He'd step in if he had to, but he really brought out the best in people. I think he attracted a lot of very good people because people wanted to work for Ray.

People felt John was a little standoffish. But in a way I don't think this impacted the REDSO staff in any adverse sense, because basically their work was in the field. They were really more subject to what was going on in the Missions, whether it was Sudan or Somalia, which you could go to at the time by the way. And actually, Somalia was booming and Somalis are very entrepreneurial. There were about a million people and seven million camels. But Mogadishu was very industrious and it's almost an argument for having a benign autocratic dictator type like Siyad Barre who basically at the time was the person in charge of Somalia. But Somalia was functioning very, very well.

There were good people in the various posts around in Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi. So as a collective group in USAID in East and Southern Africa, I think it was a very solid group of people, many who would go on to senior management roles.

Maybe John can tell me what happened, but in 1981 USAID as an Agency adopted the State Department structure for Foreign Service Officers so that both Agencies used the same system. All I can remember is what happened when I got promoted in 1981 from being an FS-1 to being a Counselor.

Q: In the Senior Foreign Service?

BLOOM: Yes, into the Senior Foreign Service. Someone would have to fill in. And it was, in a sense, a relatively early promotion, and again I probably give credit to Ray Love for this.

Q: The programs in East and Southern Africa you were working with, were they all just more traditional project assistance, or were there any other kinds of more novel assistance?

BLOOM: They were overwhelmingly project assistance and in the sectors we were talking about. There were large PL-480 (Public Law 480) programs going on, and in fact, I remember our PL-480 staff, a couple of young guys, whose names I forget, were putting down their percentage of travel time. And they said, "A hundred and ten percent." And I said, "Where did you get the extra 10 percent?" And somehow there was an answer, but it was real. They were on the road all the time. But we were doing agriculture, we were doing health, we were doing population, we were doing irrigation, and a rural sector grant as you said. I don't remember program assistance. Maybe to the Mission in Kenya, but I don't really remember that happening.

There was one time I got to Sudan because we had an East African Mission Director's Conference in Khartoum. Ray came, and Harradine Johnson came from the Africa Bureau because she was a backstopping officer and Khartoum was a very interesting place. It was the confluence of the Blue and the White Nile, and it's where General Gordon was massacred by the Mahdi in the Siege of Khartoum in 1885. But I do remember that we went out in the desert and we saw the whirling dervishes.

That was exciting and very real. So in terms of a place and an area and an experience, it was a very positive one, I think, for most of the people and their families. People were comfortable in Nairobi because the weather was so nice. You could go to the game parks, you could go be outside, you could play tennis.

John reminded me and asked me if India was where I played squash. No, there was a great club in Nairobi that everybody belonged to, called Parklands. It had tennis, and these boxes which were called squash courts. We didn't know what they were. So all of us tennis players, like Larry Hausman and me, and several others, said, "Well, let's take this up." And that's where I really learned squash. It stayed with me in other posts and to this day, because there were a number of Asians in East Africa still, they were top squash players. It was a wonderful place to be. So it was very positive from that point of view.

My own role personally was very much in management. I got less involved with projects, except helping review them, and as things came up, giving guidance, and helping make choices about whether we should send somebody or not when Missions requested it. Often times they requested it and it didn't make sense. And so I had a real management role and I was managing a lot of people. As I said, we had 30 professionals which, as

John knows, meant a lot of writing of Employee Evaluation Reports (EERs), and boy was that painful. Not only having to write the senior ones, ten or so, I don't know, I had to review the other 20.

Q: Oh, my.

BLOOM: Anybody in USAID will tell you that writing EERs is not the most exciting experience in life. But you tried to do a good job. And I got some good people promoted because I tried to take it seriously. So it was a good experience and we left because we had done a mid-tour transfer from India and I had finished the three years. We went overseas when our kids were three months old and three years old, and I felt, "Isn't it time to come back to the U.S.?" So I sought an assignment in the U.S. The kids were six and nine, and I thought "It's about time they got a little sense of what life in the U.S. is like."

But again, my savior became Ray Love. I didn't really search around so much, somehow, and I don't remember how this happened exactly, but I got appointed to be the head of what was then the Asia Project Development Office.

Q: Okay. So you left Nairobi for a direct transfer back to Washington?

BLOOM: In 1984, we finished our full tour of two years, took home leave, and I started in the Asia Bureau as head of what was the Asia Project Development Office, which lasted from 1984 to 1985. I think there were some sub-offices, I can't recall exactly how many people were under me. So I was in in the Asia Project Development Office. And the Bureau then started something which was called the 'Asia Experiment' which was to delegate authority to Missions to basically approve projects and to approve all implementation steps. The goal was to stop this process of having staff come in from the field with their project paper and having the people sit around the table and critique it even though they weren't out there to develop it, and to take the liberties that they did and put their input in. This always struck me as a little strange because then those same people would be out in the field and they'd have to come back and get critiqued.

The Asia Bureau actually got the Agency's first implementation award which was at a ceremony with a big audience. It was a USAID-wide ceremony. I was relatively new in my position but I was called up by Kelly Kammerer who I think was Counselor at the time, and he said, "Peter, we're going to talk about the award. We're giving it to the Asia Bureau for the 'Asia Experiment', and you as head of the Project Office are the kind of person that ought to be accepting it. So you'll come out to the stage, I'll have a folder, you'll open it up, you'll see a blank piece of paper because we haven't decided how much money or how we will do it, or who will get it, or whatever." And that's exactly what happened. There were probably hundreds of people in the audience when this great award was announced. I went up and took a nice folder from -- I can't remember if it was Kelly or the Administrator – and shook his hand, took it back and opened it up and there was a blank piece of yellow-lined paper inside. I don't know where that's gone to this day, but that's an absolute true story. And I'm glad I got a little warning.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: It was a typical backstop office, but I had very good people working there, and within a year the Agency decided to merge the Near East and the Asia Bureaus. So they created what was called the Asia Near East (ANE) Bureau. And the Assistant Administrator was Charlie Greenleaf, a Republican from Michigan. Rocky Staples was the Deputy. Rocky had come over from the Ford Foundation and was really a development professional and very, very good. Both of them were excellent managers.

So when I came over, the decision had to get made as to who would head the Project Development Office, the person who was heading the Near East (Bob Bell) or me. But they moved Bob Bell to be a Deputy. They moved him up as one of the Deputies for the Near East side, and Jim Norris was on the Asia side. So I don't know whether there was a lottery or what, but I guess I won out and I became the Director of ANE/PD, and Ron Venezia became my Deputy. He was very good. And we had a terrific staff. We had three or four sub-offices and I probably had 20 some Americans working under me because that's a big geographic area.

You're talking all the way from North Africa through Indonesia, and again it was a backstopping role where staff were able to go out on assignments and help Missions. I thought Charlie and Rocky were excellent managers. If you did your work, they definitely were not micro-managers, they gave you a free hand but they stepped in where necessary They, particularly Charlie, were very decisive. He would make decisions. And, if you ask me, a key to management is to make a decision. It may not always be the right decision, but it's better to make a decision, and move on. And most employees wanted that to happen. I think Charlie was a prime example of that and he usually made good decisions, I thought. And he usually deferred and listened to his staff, but he had very fixed ideas also and that was fine, that was part of his role. And he ran interference for us.

Rocky was such a good development specialist. During that time Rocky then got sent out to become the Mission Director in Pakistan, even though he had really only been with USAID for a short time from the Ford Foundation. Then Jim Norris became one Deputy for the Asia side, and for the Near East side it was Bob Bell, who also hadn't been overseas for a very, very long time. And ultimately he went to Kenya, sometime after I left.

It was probably salutary to be back in the U.S. Our kids really didn't know America. We were living in Glover Park. Then we bought a house in Bethesda after one year, because we couldn't find a house big enough or that we could afford in the District. And so the kids did some primary school there. I'm trying to remember what my wife Gretchen did, but I'm sure she was getting busy at the time. [Note from Gretchen: She was managing the Association for Women in Development Forum (AWID) in 1985 and working as the Coordinator for U.S. Chapters of the Society for International Development (SID).]

I would call Washington management in my time pretty benign. John may agree or not agree, I don't know what his experiences were. I mean I thought USAID/W really did not have a heavy hand with the Missions. At least I never felt it. And I thought then our staff could do its work and basically was trying to be supportive of Missions.

I remember very much helping out in the Indonesia Mission. It was headed by Bill Fuller whom some people may remember. He later became head of the Asia Society in San Francisco at some point. He was also a top development type. And you know, he'd have a little trouble, and basically I looked at our role as to really help the Missions and not make Washington an impediment. And I think that we essentially did that.

We also had, by the way, excellent people during the period. We had to work with the Program Office and the desks. And they had excellent people. The Program Officer was Larry Crandall who was enjoyable and fun, and interesting, and bright. And then Priscilla Boughton was heading the South Asia Office. But we had people like Jeff Malick who was the Afghan Desk Officer, and Dave Garms and Bob Dakin, and we would all put on our Indian accents and drive Priscilla crazy. And she would say, "Oh no, not again." But it was important that we work together and I thought we worked together pretty well.

And you probably can get a lot of this by reading Larry Crandall's oral history, but I did get involved in what was the cross-border program for Afghanistan because there were such projects. As people may remember, or Larry certainly probably laid out, we were trying to provide the Seven Party Alliance, based in Pakistan and including the Taliban and some of the worst Afghan warlords, with health and educational material to take across the border, which is why it was called a cross-border program. But they were projects and they basically got reviewed in Washington to a large extent. And people came and went and Larry was very instrumental and involved in that.

It was an interesting piece of the work because it was really being done more from the Washington side than the field. But in essence it was a good experience. I learned a lot and I learned from working with good people and I thought Bob Bell and Jim Norris were excellent Deputies, as well as Rocky. And by a miracle of all miracles, and this today I still do not understand, I somehow got promoted to be a Minister Counselor from a Washington job. When I tell USAID colleagues that, they are amazed and ask, "What, how could that happen?" And I say, "I have no idea." It happened actually before my seven years were up. There is a later story about the Senior Foreign Service regarding how much time you could have as an FSO.

I won't go into that now, but I'll segue. What happened is that I was selected in '87 to be the one person to go to the Kennedy School for the one-year Master's (degree) in public policy. USAID was sending staff for a number of years. I was excited and wanted to go, partly because I'd been at Harvard and I wanted the kids to see Boston. In fact, I prematurely in a sense, applied for and got housing. I got a three-bedroom apartment and paid for a month and was ready to go. I have to be honest, I can't say I was so intellectually interested in going back to school, but I was very interested in going back to Boston. I'm a New Englander anyway from Rhode Island. And I enjoyed my time at

Harvard. I wanted the kids to see hockey games and the Red Sox. This was probably in the late spring, May or June. I probably applied in June to take a July apartment even though August was when the course started.

At that time the Mission Director in Sri Lanka was Bob Chase and it turned out that Bob got recruited, or looked for, or somehow got a job as the number three person in the U.N. World Food Programme in Rome, Italy.

So suddenly there came a vacancy in Sri Lanka and staff were saying, "Wow." They knew about it and they didn't have any idea who would go. I'll just stop after telling you this story. So I was having dinner with the kids, expecting to go to Cambridge -- we always liked to have dinner together at 7:30 -- when I got a call from Charlie Greenleaf.

And Charlie said, "Peter, it's not going to be easy, there's a war going on, and things are confusing. How would you like to go out and be a Mission Director in Sri Lanka?" And I said, "Gee, that sounds interesting, I'd really like to talk to the family." And he says, "Well." And here I was on the phone looking at my kids and my wife, and wondering, "Do I go to Harvard, or to Sri Lanka?" I think I'll continue that story the next time around if that's okay.

Q: This is John Pielemeier on March 12, 2018. I'm having a third interview with Peter Bloom. We left with Peter being assigned to a new post as Mission Director in Sri Lanka, and Peter, take it from there.

BLOOM: Well, my first comment is going to be that it is very exciting to go out to a country as a Mission Director. That's what you aspire to in USAID. A lot of the ideas that you've always had you can put into effect and hopefully you can have a favorable impact, so it was very exciting. Plus, I think it was a very good time because our children were then nine and twelve, and it was the first post we went to when they were old enough to really appreciate it. They loved their time there. Sri Lanka is a beautiful country, the people are extremely nice, they're extremely warm, they're extremely open, and they're well educated. You can go all the way from beautiful beaches to hill country, and see historic sites. Traveling around there is a wonderful thing to do.

Although I must say, it has some of the worst traffic I've ever seen. Nobody ever told you how far something was. Let's say you wanted to go to the town of Kandy where there is the famous Temple of the Tooth, where it's supposed to have Buddha's tooth. Our son was very skeptical, saying, "Why do I have to keep brushing my teeth if a tooth can stay for 2,000 years?" But no one ever said, "It's X miles." They said, "It will take you X amount of time." And that's true. You probably didn't go more than 25 miles an hour on just about any highway in the country. It's a tiny country; yet it took you a long time to get anywhere. But it was worth it because the scenes were really pretty.

Now when I went out in 1987 a lot of people, including Assistant Administrator Charlie Greenleaf, felt that this could be tough because of the civil war that was going on between the Tamil Tigers and the Government, which was primarily Sinhalese. Most of

the Tamils were Hindu.

Q: The Sinhalese were Buddhist.

BLOOM*:* The Sinhalese were Buddhist, but it was a Sinhalese -Tamil struggle, more than a religious conflict, also because many of the Tamils were Christian. There was also some disparagement of the Muslims who make up about 6 percent of the population. But by and large, it didn't impact on the USAID program. You didn't come into Colombo through a lot of checkpoints, you didn't feel the country was under siege per se. There were some incidents almost as soon as we got there, and I'll get into it. But the background to it was that basically the Tamils had been educated in a lot of the missionary schools during the British rule. They were more educated and their English was much better, and they were basically hired by the British when the British were still the colonial rulers up until 1951, after World War II. (The British had succeeded the Portuguese and the Dutch as colonial rulers in Ceylon.) The Tamils were occupying a lot of the positions and the Sinhalese said, "Wait a minute, this is our country, why are we not taking charge of all of this? Why do they have such an advantage?"

Q: What percent of the population were Sinhalese?

BLOOM*:* I'd say 70 percent at least (actually 75 percent). And maybe five or six percent Muslim (actually nine percent), and the rest would be Tamils (Sri Lanka Tamils 11 percent, Indian Tamils 4 percent, for 15 percent) I would not say the Tamils were oppressed per se, as has happened in other countries where there are rebellions like in Peru with the "Sendero Luminoso" (Shining Path). But what happened was, in the 1950s, the Prime Minister was Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who was assassinated by a Buddhist priest in 1959. He was succeeded by his wife Sirima, who became the world's first female Prime Minister. They felt, "It's our island, we're the majority, we're Buddhist, we should be in control of these things." And then what they did is that they implemented a Sinhala Language Only Act which made Sinhala the national language. You had to choose between Sinhala or Tamil for your education. That was a beginning of a division that had a tremendously divisive impact upon people.

Q: This was where you had to choose in the schools, or where?

BLOOM: You had to choose in the schools, so English no longer became the binding language. Although I would have to say that many of our friends in Colombo of our age at the time were definitely intermarried and there were no problems, and they said they never grew up with problems. Obviously over time, this got more and more into the skin of the Tamil population who were mostly in the North and East. Many of the Tamils, called Sri Lankan Tamils, had been in the country for centuries, descended from the Tamils of the old Jaffna Kingdom. The other Tamils, called Indian Tamils, are descendants of bonded laborers sent from Tamil Nadu in India in the 19th century to work on tea plantations. A very charismatic Tamil leader, named Prabhakaran, put together the Tamil Tigers, probably one of the best rebel movements that has gone in many, many different countries.

So things didn't really heat up too much until 1983. Apparently the Tamils attacked some police station somewhere in the North or in the southern part of the Northeast. They killed a bunch of Sinhalese policemen, and then things erupted in Colombo where Sinhalese then went into people's households and went after Tamils who were working there. And there was a conflagration at that point. By that time the rebel movement was being built up in the northeast by Prabhakaran's followers. It wasn't a large group necessarily and it had calmed down a bit.

When we arrived in '87 with our kids, if you didn't know about this history and if you didn't know what happened, you wouldn't have the sense that something was going on that was pretty dramatic. And for the most part, in the time that I was there which was until December '89, that continued to be the case and one could travel around. There were some other issues that came up which I'll get to later. The reason to provide this background is that the Tamil Tigers were very good at doing PR (Public Relations), and they had Europeans and Americans including Ted Kennedy convinced that they were the oppressed people, fighting for rights which they never got, and so on. I would argue the point that that's not really the case at all. Any student of history can go back and look at all of this history.

But because of that, the outside world thought that the country was under siege, and that we were at risk. They wondered: "How could you take your kids?" In fact, there were even warnings out, or people would call, and I would say, "Nonsense." In fact, during our two and a half years, that warning still held. So, one has to keep this in mind. Basically, Colombo was peaceful and USAID didn't work in the Northeast.

I would like to say one thing too in terms about how literate this population is and bring up something John may remember. Somewhere in the '60s or '70s there was a U.S. policy group that was trying to come up with a different measure of how a country is doing to guide donors as to where they should put their money. It seemed that GDP (Gross Domestic Product) was no longer the best measure. The new index was called a PQLI (Physical Quality of Life Index), and it was a major matrix which came up to a point like a pyramid, based on three indictors. The indicators were life expectancy, infant mortality, and literacy.

Sri Lanka came up very, very high on the index and because of that, it actually got more money allocated by USAID. One example of a country that didn't was Brazil, which John will know, but this was much earlier. Brazil came out very low on the PQLI. It was an interesting concept that lasted for a few years with some extra funding for some countries, but it gives you an idea of the kind of people that we were dealing with. And that was very good.

Q: Right.

BLOOM*:* So it was very exciting getting there. The kids were excited. I remember driving to the USAID Office in a bullet proof car with windows that couldn't open. So

the next day I said, “Do I have to have this car?” and the Security Officer said, “Not really.” So I said, “Okay, let’s get rid of it, I want to roll down the windows, I don’t want the kids to have an issue.”

There were two things that happened within that first month that are related. Number one, it appeared that there was going to be some peaceful negotiations between the Tamil Tigers and the Sinhalese, and that peace would break out in the Northeast. USAID was willing and said, “Put a program together,” and provided funding of an additional 75 million dollars for projects that would take place in the North and East which had, to a certain extent, been destroyed. The infrastructure, schools, agriculture, there were a lot of interruptions. The Tigers were a very tough group, they would just pull kids out of their houses and make them child soldiers, so it wasn’t particularly pleasant. But we were able to do that. I had a wonderful Project Officer, Dennis Zvinakis, and within the first few weeks we pulled something together. The project was basically going to provide agricultural implements, tools, seeds, and so on. Also, we provided construction material for housing to rebuild schools and libraries. We got approval for it and started the program, but it really didn’t go anywhere. The fighting, I think, got too intense and basically, my memory isn’t that good, we probably didn’t disburse a whole lot of that money.

But something else happened within our first two or three weeks in Sri Lanka, Rajiv Gandhi came to Colombo. He brought with him 2,000 troops which he felt would go up into the North, into the Tamil area, and within a few weeks end this so-called insurrection, civil war, or whatever you want to call it. Well, some years later, when the Indians left with 2,000 or 3,000 dead Indians, you could see how successful that was. And people were very surprised.

But as Gandhi paraded before the military, all lined up, one sailor came out and bopped him on the head. He wasn’t hurt but, immediately, we had a curfew for two weeks. And over the time there were many curfews and sometimes we were puzzled why. But I had a pass as the Mission Director. So there we were with our kids in the house for the first time. We had bought a little puppy so that was good. And nobody could go anywhere. I had a pass but I had no idea how to drive to the USAID Mission or the Embassy. But I did get some help.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: But that passed also and then basically I took the role of a Mission Director in what I would consider one of the best Missions in terms of staff and personnel where I have worked. It made my job easy; it made my job enjoyable. I had a Deputy, Gary Nelson, who could have run the Mission. I had a project staff with Dennis Zvinakis, Pamela Baldwin, Bill Jeffers, and I had a health person, Eileen Oldwine.

One of the good stories I like is about our Admin Officer named Clyde Larson, a veteran. I called him in and said, “Clyde, I want you to say ‘yes’ to everything I ask unless you can give me a reason to say ‘no’,” because I’d had so many negative experiences with

Admin Officers in my career, I thought this is one thing I can do as a Mission Director. Well, he was way ahead of me and he was terrific. And I asked him one simple thing at the beginning. I said, "Listen, is it within the rules, regulations, or the law that we can provide new families when they arrive in country with a USAID vehicle for two weekends so that they can go and get acclimatized to the country? One suggestion is to go down to the beaches in the south, the other is to go up to Kandy." And he said, "Sure, no problem." Well, I said, "Wow, being a Mission Director is a wonderful thing. All you have to do is come up with a good idea and have a good Admin Officer." And that was really nice. And I enjoyed that a lot!

Another minor thing: I had a good predecessor, Bob Chase. So I went to my first "senior" staff meeting. Well, let me back up a little bit. The size of the Mission was about 20 Americans, 20 good professional Sri Lankans, and probably another 20 in support staff, at least. And they were all excellent. So we had our first "senior" staff meeting and twelve people showed up. So I conducted whatever business I had with them. But it puzzled me: what do they do afterward? Do they go back and tell the other eight people what happened? So I said, "From now on for our senior staff meeting, as we only have 20 people, we will have all in the staff meeting." And that's another thing where I said, "Gee, you can do things very quickly." And I said, "You know what, I don't want to make this a mystery. Why don't we have the Sri Lankan professional staff come at least once a month and sit in, or any time there is something particular going on? And so we implemented that practice. That was my management style and it was very much of an open door. But the fact that I could just say and do these things I think was very rewarding, assuming people liked it.

I also did something that John may understand. I often throw out a lot of thoughts and ideas, but they just come out, sometimes not well thought out. I had to convince the staff that I meant it, and I did -- I was very explicit – to come and challenge me. I said, "Just because I'm in a position of authority and say something, don't take it as an authoritarian dictate. My door's open, I like it, I like the dialogue."

The U.S. staff got it, they absolutely got it. Believe me, I got challenged. And the same thing with the Sri Lankan staff -- they were sophisticated enough to understand the same thing. So nobody just accepted what I said -- they did come and we did discuss. I was very open, you just had to convince me. Again, it's just a way of talking about a management style. I believe in transparency. I don't want chaos but I liked the fact that staff would come in with their own ideas and really take me on. And as a result, we came out to a much better place. So it was a very good Mission.

The biggest program in Sri Lanka for most donors and for USAID as well, was in an area called the Mahaweli River Basin. It was very large and had mostly dryland agriculture except that it had a number of rivers going through it. A couple of donors, I believe the Canadians, had built large dams for power. We really got into small scale dams, sluice gates, and irrigation ditches, and we were trying to promote small-scale agriculture and private enterprise in the Mahaweli. But the Mahaweli Authority was very large and very good, and I remember very clearly going over to meet the first Director, called the

Secretary, of the Mahaweli. This is a good Sri Lanka story.

Q: But USAID had helped build the physical side with loans, correct?

BLOOM: USAID continued to work in the Mahaweli during my time in country.

Q: But there was construction financed by USAID before the later technical assistance, correct?

BLOOM: I'd say at the same time. At least during my period of time, John, but you're probably right, yes. Because clearly, it has always been a major development area. They wanted to create a huge piece of the country, which is sort of central, into something that could be productive. And basically, that became effective.

Q: Okay, alright.

BLOOM: So I went over to meet this person and I said, "My name is Mr. Bloom. I'm the new Mission Director." And he said, "Call me Ivan, you'll never learn how to pronounce my last name." And that is classic Sri Lankan. It was Ivan Samarawickrema, but if you saw it written, it would take you awhile. You would tumble over your tongue.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: But it was only a couple of months before the Mahaweli Authority was taken over by a person who became a very close friend of mine and our family and still is today. His name was Lalit Godamunne. We decided very early on to take our first trip up to the Mahaweli because so much of our program was there. Our program was in agriculture and in small industry on a very small scale. It was mostly in the private sector -- irrigation, irrigation canals, sluice gates, irrigation management, and so on. Accompanying us on the trip was the head of the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), a Nepalese man named Bhekh Thapa. Bhekh was exceptional and was twice Ambassador to the United States from Nepal. It was really phenomenal to have him along on the trip.

And then I had this idea and I'll tell you why. I said, "Gee, I think I'd like to take our son Seth on the trip -- he's 12 years old." Here's why this idea came to me. When I was in India, I remember a top Agriculture Economist from the World Bank going to the major high school and asking the kids, "What do most Indians do?" And they raised their hands and they said, "They're taxi drivers." Or they said, "No, they're *ayahs*, no they're, no they're this." And he looked at them and said, "They're farmers." Well, it hit me that sometimes you go to post and you bring your kids and they have no idea what you are doing. And so I sort of asked, maybe coerced a little, my son who was 12 to accompany us. We got there in June and school wasn't going to start again until late August anyway. And that turned out to be a terrific idea. My wife Gretchen also came on that trip so it was a very nice group with Lalit, with Bhekh Thapa, and maybe there was another Mahaweli person, and Gretchen and Seth, and we made our way through the Mahaweli.

One of Seth's memories from that trip is something that would surprise people. Farmers would dig huge, huge ponds that would fill with water, and this is where tropical fish were raised. Tropical fish vendors in Colombo brought up fingerlings, and they would go up to these farmers which had these huge ponds filled with fertilizer from pig feces, they would drop off the fingerlings and then come back several weeks later and pick up larger tropical fish. That is something that stuck in our son's head forever. So we traveled around the Mahaweli and there was no question, it was interesting.

One of the things that I really think was quite significant is that Sri Lanka had been doing irrigation for centuries, using tanks surrounded by *bunds*. We would call them dams. So we were doing one particular small dam with a sluice gate, and as they dug down through it, they found that it was in exactly the same spot as a 1,000-year-old tank had been. And there was a sluice gate. I have a wonderful photo of Seth, at 12 years old, standing on top of what would have been our sluice gate. We spent $180,000 to move it so that we would be able to preserve it. But it just shows you the continuity. What we were doing was being done 1,000 years earlier by the Sri Lankans.

It was a very good trip. I think it was salutary that a kid would be able to understand why we are in a particular country and what we're doing. And it did stick with him. I proposed the idea later to other Missions, and back in Washington. Why shouldn't we finance one trip in country to a project for every family? But that didn't get much traction. I still think it's a good idea. I have no idea whether anybody would implement it, but there's nothing to stop anybody from implementing it.

In terms of the environment, the school was a very small school, called the Overseas Children's School. Eighty (80) percent of the teachers were Sri Lankan, who used first names. The kids did absolutely fine, they liked it, it was very enjoyable. There's something that is very well known, the Colombo Swim Club, which was really an old colonial British type club with a big swimming pool. And that's where all the kids hung out after school. But what was nice was that, to travel around Colombo, you could go on these three wheelers called Bajaj (or Tuk-tuks). Well, we got to trust the drivers a lot because we got to know them, as they hung outside the gate of our house. So we permitted our son Seth, when he came home from school, to accompany his sister, our daughter, who was about nine, to go on one of those without our supervision to the Colombo Swim Club. And that's what they did with most of their friends, and Sri Lankan kids as well. It was absolutely major and we loved it also. Of course, there was a bar and a bunch of old ex-pats sitting around with a dart board and drinking beer. And you could have lovely meals overlooking the Indian Ocean. It was just absolutely wonderful. In fact, all I could see outside of my office was water, just the Indian Ocean.

In terms of traveling around the country, the traffic may be heavy and it may be slow, but if you wend your way on up through Kandy, where as I said the very well-known temple of the Tooth is, they have a ceremony called the Perahera. Once a year they take the Buddha's tooth out and they mount it on the back of an elephant that is all decked out and parade around Kandy. It's a major, major ceremony. And it's pretty exciting.

Then you wend your way up into the hill country into Nuwara Eliya, the hill station. What you're going through are the tea plantations for which Sri Lanka is very well known. The lush scenery is absolutely beautiful, You see these women with their saris, just as you'd see on the cover of *National Geographic*, picking tea leaves.

And you end up at the Hill Club where you stayed. It's probably 6000 feet up, which was a welcome relief sometimes from the heat and humidity of Colombo. You had the sense that you were back in the days of the Raj. There would be a hot water bottle put into your bed at night by your feet to keep you warm. Men did have to wear a necktie at dinner, but there was a closet full of ties so you could make a choice. Good, because I never brought one with me. And there was a nice golf course up there as well. So life went on quite well.

Q: What kind of projects were you doing there other than the Mahaweli?

BLOOM: We were definitely big into the environment, and basically trying to build up the Ministry because it didn't get a lot of funding. Because, as we all know, a number of developing countries feel as though, "We can't afford to do this, this is a First World thing." I think by the time I left we had about a third of the portfolio in the environment sector. But I don't remember specifically what kind of projects there were.

Q: Okay.

BLOOM*:* Another major project was focused on our support for NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). Most of the NGOs were small and USAID was not in the business of retailing NGO support. But there existed, and still exists, in Sri Lanka the largest NGO in that country, known internationally, called Sarvodaya. It was started by a man named Dr. Ariyaratne. Ari was well known and we went down to visit him and to look at his operation.

Q: When you say "down," where did you go?

BLOOM: The headquarters were a couple of hours south of Colombo near Ratnapura, if I recall correctly He was a very charismatic figure, known a little bit in the same way that Mohammad Yunus was known in Bangladesh for financing small projects for the poor. But Sarvodaya is a real force, and we felt that we could give them a significant amount of money and that they could then dole out much smaller amounts to other NGOs working across sectors, whether education, health, or agriculture. It was very well established and, it may not sound like a lot, but I think we gave a half-million-dollar grant to Sarvodaya, knowing that they would manage it and that we could monitor it through them.

Now I have another nice story. It was very easy to meet Sri Lankans. One of our friends was a woman named Beulah Moonesinghe who was doing women's enterprise in the Mahaweli. She got to know my wife and then she came to my office one day and said, "Do you think that we could get a grant from you for AgroMart, say of $5,000?" I said,

"No, Beulah, you can't get a grant for $5,000, but if you ask for $50,000, we might say yes." And that's exactly what happened.

Q: Oh.

BLOOM: AgroMart was basically a women's NGO working on private enterprise development, and a lot of it was in the Mahaweli. They gave prizes at an annual fair, sent women to Bangkok for exposure to new ideas, and taught women new agricultural skills. It was a wonderful program and I believe it has continued, or at least it was still functioning when we returned to Sri Lanka in 2015.

But life was not always peaceful. There definitely were occasional eruptions in Colombo, incursions by the Tigers, but not on a mass scale. They would come in and target certain people. In my time there, three of the major leaders -- actually four if you include Rajiv Gandhi, -- were killed by the Tigers. So I don't want to understate their impact.

But the Minister of Agriculture, if you could pronounce his name, was a good friend of Beulah's and of ours, Lalith Athulathmudali, if you can get that off your tongue. Once you've said that you know you're in Sri Lankan territory. Sadly he was assassinated by the Tigers. These are leaders who would have been Prime Ministers. The Prime Minister for most of our time was Premadasa.

After I left, he ultimately also got assassinated. In addition to which, they brought down Rajiv Gandhi, and he got assassinated. So I'm not going to underplay it, except that it didn't impact so strongly in terms of our movement and program. But USAID/Washington began to think that nothing could be going on out there and wondered what was happening. They weren't bothering us per se, but they were sort of saying, "Well, you're in this backwater, and this civil war is going on." I referred to this earlier when I was talking about my time in Nigeria, about how to deal with a problem like this, There at that time the Mission Director, Mike Adler, said, "Listen, we have to send in a cable every day about what kind of aid USAID is giving.

I forgot to mention that I had the most outstanding Agriculture Officer I have ever worked with in my life, John Flynn. He was fantastic. So much so that we had a meeting set up with the Minister of Agriculture and he said, "Do you want to come?" And I said, "John, what do I know about agriculture? You know a lot more about agriculture than I do. You go." (In most USAID Missions, the Ambassador would insist on going to any meeting with a Minister as would the Mission Director – not me.)

Now here's another reminder though about how enjoyable it was working with the Mahaweli Authority. There wasn't a lot of conflict in and around the areas we were working in. We couldn't go to the Northeast, and I never got to Trincomalee, on the Eastern side, probably still the biggest, largest, most coveted uninhabited bay in the Indian Ocean. It would be like a Subic Bay in the Philippines, but every country wanted it and nobody's had it. And it never got developed and I never got there.

But there was so much involvement in the Mahaweli that I said, “I’ll tell you what. Why don’t we have a sports day? And it will be USAID and the Mahaweli.” And Lalit Godamunne, who was my good friend and was the Secretary of the Mahaweli, said, “What a great idea.” And so he arranged it all at a sports field. Everyone was to bring their family, everyone was to bring the kind of food they wanted and exchange it. He created a whole series of different events, even for kids. There were various kinds of races, sack races, some swimming. And this goes back to my interest in cricket which I mentioned in India, which I became passionate about because I can’t live in a country that is passionate about a sport and not understand it.

By the way, Sri Lanka is absolutely just as passionate about cricket as India. And it has won the world championship at times, even as a very small country. Anyway, we arranged this Sports Day. There were two big events -- one was cricket and one was softball. Ironically USAID, won the cricket, and the Mahaweli won the softball. Obviously, we had Sri Lankan staff at USAID who were very good.

It was very interesting to watch, in the softball game, how the Sri Lankans who were used to playing cricket, swung at everything. The pitch could be here, or there -- we never knew where the ball was going -- and we figured they were not going to swing. The ball was way outside, way too high, way too low, but they swung. It was very bonding, and it was good for the kids. Sri Lanka was and is the kind of country which is beautiful, is friendly, and has nice people. We made a lot of very binding friendships which we still have to this day. As I mentioned, it’s a beautiful country to travel around. I did mention the hill station and the tea plantations. And as you come down the back side from Nuwara Eliya, you’re going through beautiful forests and greenery and hills and little rivers. And you come across a rest stop, at a small town called Kitulgala, where they filmed ‘Bridge on the River Kwai’. There were photographs on the wall of this little rest stop, of William Holden and Alec Guinness, it was so famous.

Q: And a very famous Japanese actor.

BLOOM: Yes. He was Sessue Hayakawa. And there it was and there were all the photos. It was very historic and very meaningful. Even to this day I suspect people know the theme song from the ‘Bridge on the River Kwai’, the Colonel Bogey March, as well as the film. So that was pretty good.

Q: Oh, good.

BLOOM: Here’s another incident. What a small country this is and how familiar things can be. I had never met Prime Minister Premadasa. He wasn’t Prime Minister when I arrived -- Jayewardene was, from a different party. But he (Premadasa) was PM for the last couple of years, but I had never met him and there hadn’t been a particular reason to do so. And I got a call one day, from his Secretary, meaning the top professional in the Prime Minister’s Office.

Saying, “The Prime Minister would like you to come over for tea on your birthday.”

Q: Oh my.

BLOOM*:* I said, "What is this all about?" He said, "Well, would you like to do this? We know that it's your 50th birthday." I was totally puzzled but I said, "Well, of course, and with my wife." And then I put the phone down and the kids came in who were then probably 11 and 14.

I'll have to backtrack a little bit. When I got sworn in as Mission Director, as you do in USAID, I couldn't convince my son to come to the ceremony. I said, "You don't have to wear a jacket, but you do have to wear a shirt, and you do have to wear long pants." He finally agreed after I promised to take him to Jacqueline's, a very famous French restaurant in Washington. Seth was a gourmet then and he is to this day.

But the kids came in and said, "We want to come." So I called back to the office and I said, "Would it be alright to bring the kids?" And he said, "Of course." The Prime Minister liked kids.

So we showed up, but I still didn't know why I was invited for my birthday celebration, by the way. But there is an ending to this and John will appreciate it. We went at the appropriate time and there were reporters and they asked, "You're coming here to present your credentials?" I said, "No." And they said, "Well, you're coming here to represent something in terms of USAID?" I said, "No." "You're leaving?" I said, "No." They said, "Why are you here?" I said, "It's my birthday."

Well, obviously that didn't make any sense to anybody. But we got ushered into his office and he was alone with just one other aid, and it was a kind of strange experience. And I don't think he had a clue as to why I was there or who I was, seriously.

Q: Oh, really?

BLOOM: Seriously. And he started talking about Buddhism and reincarnation, and he looked at our daughter and said, "You are destined to come back here," and so on. Then we had a nice little ceremony and he gave me a lovely teapot and tea set which I still have. And a nice picture of us. And we left.

Q: How long did that take?

BLOOM*:* Oh, probably we were in his office about a half an hour. And Premadasa was talking about all sorts of things that had no relation to anything. He didn't seem particularly interested in the USAID program and I don't know if he knew much about it or not. But his Ministers did. And we left.

And then that night, what was the major news? The major news on television and in the newspaper with pictures was that Mr. Bloom presented his credentials to the Prime

Minister. And I was saying, "What is this all about?" And only then did I find out what happened.

There was a Sri Lankan, Nihal Goonewardene, whom John knows well, who was running a consulting firm in Washington DC. Nihal knew the Secretary well and, unknown to me, but known to my wife, he sent the Secretary a telegram and said, "Wouldn't it be nice if the Prime Minister invited Mr. Bloom for tea on his 50th birthday?" He knew what my birthday was, thanks to Gretchen. I didn't know anything about this until afterward. Nihal ran a very good firm, the International Science and Technology Institute (ISTI), in the late 80s and early 90s. It no longer exists. But it was just amazing and it was an incredible memory, and also a nice memory for the kids.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: But it's the kind of country where something like that could happen. It couldn't happen in India. It's too big, too diverse, and too dispersed. But the sad thing is that Premadasa was one of the four people I mentioned who ultimately got assassinated by the Tigers.

Q: When you were still there or after you left?

BLOOM*:* No, that was fairly shortly after I left.

BLOOM*:* We also had a fantastic Ambassador, Jim Spain. Jim Spain was a very seasoned man. He had been Ambassador to Turkey. At one point he was considered to be Deputy at the U.N. It's kind of an involved story why it didn't happen but he went as Ambassador to Tanzania. But while in Turkey he wrote two incredible books, one on the Pathans, and one on what life was like for a Foreign Service family with four kids in a major country.

He and I got along fine. He was the brightest person in the Embassy. He had had a tragedy in his life (his wife and daughter were killed in a traffic accident) and he got himself into Buddhism in Sri Lanka as a result. But he was an old-line Ambassador and when I first went in to see him in his office, we would disagree about things, for example, whether families could do something, or what the school could do, or housing. And I don't know whether I'm stubborn or not, but I tended not to really want to leave the office until I thought logic had prevailed. To give Ambassador Spain his due, he usually acceded if it was reasonable, so that each time when I walked in the next time, he would ask, "Well, what does the new Foreign Service want today?" And that was real.

Another person who was living in Sri Lanka at the time was Arthur C. Clarke. He was the well-known British co-author of the screenplay for the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which we all know, as well as many books on space travel. And why he was in Sri Lanka is this. He was an astrophysicist but he couldn't go into space for health reasons. But he came to the U.S. and helped at NASA and was very involved with our space program. But he decided what he could do was go down under water and became a big fan of scuba

diving . And so what he decided to do was write a definitive book on the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. So he took a paquebot out from the U.K. (a steamboat for mail and passengers) and he went by Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon, and was taken off and was taken around the island. He fell in love with the place and said, "If I get my life together, this is where I want to spend the rest of my life." And that's exactly what happened.

BLOOM: Arthur C. Clarke was there during our whole time and we definitely saw him and met him because the Ambassador and he became good friends. Or, as the Ambassador would say, they were "two old guys playing ping pong who were half deaf." But it was very nice. Again, it describes a kind of a small community.

And one certainly had many, many Sri Lankan friends. There are really bright and interesting artists and musicians, economists, it didn't matter, work, non-work, and so on. But Arthur C. Clarke was given permission to spend the rest of his life there. Citizenship wasn't important. He basically did live in Sri Lanka, in Colombo, and he continued to write.

When Jim Spain retired, he decided that he also wanted to stay in Sri Lanka rather than go back to Chicago. He had lost his wife and daughter in a tragic situation, as mentioned. And in fact, this is exactly what happened. And I'll get to it a little later, that I saw him sometime later. But again, it's a tribute to who he was and his understanding of Sri Lanka.

Q: Did you get up to Jaffna? Is it in the far North?

BLOOM*:* Yes, the far North. I did get up to Jaffna one time. While the fighting was getting heavier, we flew up in a chartered plane. The Ambassador flew up and brought me with him. Basically Jaffna was very heavily guarded. You could only go to certain areas, but the Government really wanted to show us how much destruction had been caused by the Tamil Tigers in terms of schools, and libraries, and roads. So it was a two-day trip with an overnight, and basically we were looking at a pretty destroyed place. It was kind of sad and nothing much would come out of it. A lot of peace initiatives, as John knows, took place in that period and afterward, but nothing really came to fruition.

Here's another good story about Tamils and Sinhalese. The Tamils were the industrious, the busiest, and produced a much higher percent of the GDP. The Sinhalese are much more laid back, and warm, and easy, and Buddhist. And this is a joke that I read before I went to Sri Lanka, written by, I think, a Sri Lankan female Harvard graduate student.

Here is the joke: "Do you know how to tell the difference between a Sinhalese and Tamil? Here's how. A Sinhalese loses his hair and he goes around and looks for every potion he can find. Or he gets any kind of Ayurvedic medicine and rubs it into his scalp. He spends weeks trying to do this, anything he can think of. And the Tamil, well, he sells his comb!". And that is a very cryptic way of describing their different natures.

I think that's a wonderful story and actually my Sri Lankan friends, Tamil or Sinhalese, appreciated it.

We didn't have any real serious issues caused by the Tigers, and thinking back about that period, anytime they attacked places, they made sure there were no ex-pats around.

In my time at least, not one ex-pat ever got harmed by any major attack by the Tamil Tigers anywhere. And they were doing incursions here and there. But what did happen in 1989 was that a Sinhalese Nationalist Movement called the JVP (People's Liberation Front -"Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna"), started to grow. They worked their way up from the South, really determined to get rid of any non-Sinhalese type. And it was almost like what is going on in Myanmar today, with Buddhists getting rid of the Rohingya. They were vicious. They would go into houses and take kids out; they would kill people whom they said they were going to kill; and they started marching up the coast They got very close to Colombo and scared so many people that the ports were told to close. All tourists had to leave. We had to close the school. It wasn't because of the Tigers; it was because of the JVP.

Our staff was told, when they went home, that they had to pull their shades down and so on. I don't recall anybody in Colombo that I knew, or on the staff, ever getting killed. But then we decided that we had to provide transportation to and from work for our Sri Lankan staff. We did that for the safety of our staff.

Most of us who lived there lived in what was called the Old Dutch quarter. The Dutch had occupied Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, back in the 17th century and they built these beautiful colonial houses. We lived in one, with a big lawn. And for one month we had third grade on our lawn. It was really nice. The class painted a wonderful little picture of what the house looked like, what our dog looked like, what the pond looked like, and we have it to this day as a great memory.

But the JVP overstepped themselves when they started taking kids out of people's houses, even from some of the military people. The Government and the military said, "Okay, enough." And they went back viciously against them and it became a very unpleasant kind of clash. A lot of innocent people were killed on both sides. But ultimately the Government did crush the movement, at least in terms of the violence it was causing.

Sadly, I had to leave post in about December 1989, after two and a half years, because I had undergone two disc operations. The first one was in Bangkok, Thailand, which was a little frightening, but nonetheless it turned out that those Thai doctors had made the right decision. And I had another one in Washington DC. But I wasn't healing well enough and after five medical evacuations, they decided that, "I think it's really time that you go back to the U.S. and take a serious look at your back." I would have loved to have finished out my tour.

It was sad to have to depart the way I did, but with fantastic memories and very good

friendships. So much so that we decided in 2005 (we were living in Italy at the time) that we would go back for a couple of months.

Q: Just before you get to that, in your program in Sri Lanka, was it mostly just Technical Assistance, or did you have any program assistance, or PL-480, or any of those things going on as well?

BLOOM: No program assistance that I can remember. I can't honestly remember about PL-480, but since it doesn't resonate so much, when I think about the staff, I think most of them were working on projects in the areas we talked about.

Q: Okay.

BLOOM: Oh, one area that we did get active in was the private sector. And we had very good staff, who helped them develop their stock market. And they were Talbot Penner and Steve Hadley. These were our two Private Sector Officers with a very good Sri Lankan, Chandima Gunawardena, who stayed a friend to this day. When we first went to what was "the stock market," people were just getting on ladders and putting prices up by hand and moving papers around. But it was a good effort, and I think it helped. We brought out a couple of really experienced senior people from some firm, I can't remember. And so we were involved very much in the private sector. We had both a good American staff in Steve and Talbot, and also a good Sri Lankan staff. And I think that was effective. Again, the AgroMart program in the Mahaweli for women was also private sector development and was another good program.

So all in all, it was an incredibly satisfying experience. Our kids loved being there, so it was tough leaving. But again as I said, 15 years later, we said, "Let's go back." But having decided that, we said, "January, February, 2005." The tsunami that people know about hit in 2004 and it hit Sri Lanka hard, as it did Indonesia and parts of India. So we waited a month but then we went back in February. And some of the NGOs we were working with, including AgroMart, including the Sri Lankan women who were running it, took us down the coast and introduced us as the former USAID Director and his wife, considered the Godparents of AgroMart. And there we were in the papers again, seeing what kind of efforts were being made. But we spent about half the time in Colombo traveling around.

We decided to go again in 2015, still living in Italy, "Let's just go back." And the fact that you can do this 25 years later and see so many of the people we had worked with. This included Lalit Godamunne who was the head of the Mahaweli Authority who ultimately, by the way, went to the World Food Programme (WFP) in Rome, Italy, for a while, and became the Country Director of WFP in Eritrea.

We remain friends to this day, as well as with Chandi, my Private Sector Officer. We went back in 2015 and spent the entire month in Colombo except for three days down in Galle Fort, which is in the South. It is a famous old fort which was done up by the Dutch. It is a lively little town with lots of little nice restaurants. A lot of activity, a lovely place

to buy cloth and with beaches nearby.

I have to say this in sum. If I were looking for a vacation, that's a country I'd go to. People are warm, people are open, and it's small enough to get around and to get a hold of in a couple of weeks. You can do the beaches, you can do the ancient cities of Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura, you can go up to Nuwara Eliya, you can see the tea plantations, and you'll be warmly greeted. It still resonates very well. It was the only place I was Mission Director. The reason will come up in my next session.

Q: But as you decided to leave, did your Deputy take over, or how were you replaced?

BLOOM: I was replaced, in fact, fairly soon by Dick Brown. He was in the ANE (Asia Near East) Bureau,) I think as the Egypt Desk Officer, and I think a fairly quick decision got made. He was due to be posted somewhere and I think it was actually going to be Bangladesh, but Dick had been in Sri Lanka with the UNDP.

I think, as I mentioned, when I was talking about the India segment, the then Assistant Administrator, Jack Sullivan, wanted an India expert to come out as Deputy. And he recruited Dick Brown from Sri Lanka who was then with the UNDP. He was a good choice. I know for a fact, that he had equally as warm a time as I did.

So it was a wonderful experience. But I do reflect on the fact that one advantage of being a Mission Director is actually that staff do something when you ask. You can change things and hopefully you can make life better and easier and more compatible. And the fact that I had an Admin Officer who was very experienced and certainly would not get me into any kind of trouble was great – and he would agree on all the kinds of things that make life better for new families. And that's my view of what we should have been. I've always looked at USAID as a family no matter where I went, and I wanted it to be a place where staff wanted to come. And we were able to recruit very, very good staff.

Anyway, there was no choice and I don't want to go into detail, but the fact was that I really did have to leave. I came back to the States. The kids finished school in December in Sri Lanka and came back and I spent about a month recovering.

So back in Washington I was able to rest for quite a while. It took a while for my back to really heal, which it did and I play squash to this day. But I again got rescued by my mentor, friend, colleague, the most wonderful human being in this world, Ray Love, who was Counselor of the Agency by then. And he knew that I probably couldn't go full out, and he created the position of Special Assistant. He gave me a huge office which actually had been occupied by Bob Halligan who was head of Personnel in SA-2 and had retired. And there I was in that building.

Basically I was helping Ray try to do things that he wanted to do around the Agency. I can't remember specifically unfortunately, but Ray probably can. As to the kinds of things we did, some of them seemed pretty reasonable and it kept me occupied without too much stress. I had no management responsibilities. I could go to Senior Staff

meetings, which were kind of a mixed experience.

Q: Who was the USAID Administrator at the time?

BLOOM: Ron Roskens. After several months of recuperating and working for Ray and getting my back together, I again got another benefit that had never happened before. Somebody decided, and I think Ray was probably one of the proponents of this, was to send somebody to the six-week Senior Management in Government Course at the Harvard Kennedy School. So I became the "guinea pig," but I think I was the first and last.

So somewhere in the summer of 1990 I did go up to Cambridge, and I did attend the six-week course. It was like a Berlitz course of the Kennedy School, and as John knows, we had always sent one USAID person per year to the one-year Senior Management Course. And as I recounted last time, I was nominated to do that earlier, but went to Sri Lanka instead. So I finally got to the Kennedy School. And it was very interesting because it was a very diverse group of people from different agencies. You had to be at a certain level. Probably a quarter of the people that were in those courses were military. There were quite a number of varied courses, but just for short periods of an hour or two here and there over five or six days a week. And anybody in the military had to be a Lieutenant General. And I must say, I was bemused when it hit me, and I said, "I'm a Lieutenant General? I think the military has a problem, or I have a real problem." But it was kind of a realization. It didn't mean so much being in the Senior Foreign Service. Sure. You want to advance as much as you can. But it doesn't have the significance of "going from a Colonel to a General."

Q: Yes.

BLOOM: And I've never felt like a General and I don't want to feel like a General. But anyway, it was an excellent course. I wish I could remember what the curriculum was because some of it was pretty fascinating. The discussion was good and it was also good to interface and interact with some of the military. Because their thinking process is a little different. But they were open and we learned and they learned. It was really a very nice benefit to be given that opportunity.

When it came to an end, it was clear by then that I better find an assignment in USAID. All of a sudden I got a call from Fred Scheck. Fred is an old friend, a senior USAID person, a Mission Director in a number of countries -- Philippines, Latin America. Fred was the Acting Assistant Administrator for the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Bureau. He called me up and said, "How would you like to become head of LAC/DR (Development Resources)?" It was the biggest office in Washington within the LAC Bureau. And I said, "Fred, why would you pick me? I know less about Latin America than anybody. You've got a whole Mafia that have spent their whole careers in LAC, they speak the language, they have probably been in 10 or 12 different countries." In some crazy ways it's the way I react. It wasn't like, "Oh, wonderful." It's just that this didn't make sense to me. His short and simple answer was, "Well, you know the

business."

So I said, "Great." And it turned out to be great because I spent four years before leaving USAID, in an area I knew nothing about, working in a language I did not speak, in countries I had never visited in my entire life and with no background. Does that make any sense? Well, according to Fred, I knew the business.

When I went into the LAC Bureau -- by that time Fred had left -- the Assistant Administrator was a man named Jim Michel. Jim had been a lawyer in State; he had been Warren Christopher's lawyer when Christopher was Deputy Secretary of State. Jim also was at one time Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Latin and Central America. In 1990, Jim was the Ambassador to Guatemala. One of Bush Sr.'s buddies, from Montana, wanted to be the Ambassador to Guatemala. So what happened was that the Acting Secretary of State was Lawrence Eagleburger. He had great respect for Jim Michel. And, though this was not political, he basically made him the Assistant Administrator of the LAC Bureau. He had never worked at USAID. And it was a brilliant choice. Jim really knew and understood the region and development. At one time early on he said, " You know, this may be the best position I have had. This is the first time I've had money." And I think he appreciated it and people appreciated him.

Anyway, Jim arrived in 1990, and I arrived that summer. His Deputy was to be Aaron Williams. Aaron was finishing up in Barbados as the Mission Director and there was a gap, so Jim decided that, to fill the gap he would have the Directors of each of the Bureau Divisions come up for a month and help out until Aaron arrived several months later. (Aaron later became Director of the Peace Corps.)

The LAC Bureau at that time was excellent. I was going to be head of LAC/DR, Norma Jean Parker was there, Tish Butler was there, Bill Schoux was there working on democracy programs. There were other people and we all worked compatibly. It was a very, very good Bureau. So when Jim decided that he would have each of us come up to help him for a month until Aaron got there, I got picked first, which again, didn't make a lot of sense since I knew the least about the area. But I spent my month and learned a great deal from Jim who was definitely one of the brightest people I ever worked for. At the end of that time, the other Office Directors said, "Why don't you just leave Bloom up there? We're happy doing what we're doing." I didn't think about it one way or the other, and he didn't seem to have a problem, so I actually spent three or four months as the Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator until Aaron arrived.

Although I must say, I was pleased when Aaron got there because I'm not sure I knew what I was doing. But I learned a great deal from Jim during the time. Naturally Jim was supposed to go to the Senior Staff meetings which were held once a week. The Administrator at the time was a man named Ron Roskens who had come from the University of Nebraska. He at one time had been the University President, I think, but he got somehow pushed out, and I'm not quite sure why. But the Deputy Administrator was Mark Edelman. I have to say, this was not necessarily in my mind, the dynamic duo. They never really made a lot of sense or were substantive, helpful or really interested in

USAID or development per se. Anyway, Jim, who was extremely bright and sensitive, but also very diplomatic and polite, was told he needed to attend these meetings which he found essentially useless. So he sent me to Senior Staff meetings where I got to listen to what would be going on at that level. And I was amazed. When I told colleagues what went on, they couldn't believe that somebody like Ron Roskens could be the Administrator. He went out on one of these trips to South Africa where he met Mandela and Bishop Tutu. When he came back, he couldn't recount a story about anything he did or what the trip was about. And we were all sitting around asking questions and wondering.

Over the course of time people, at least in our Bureau, got to recognize this and said, "You know what the N stands for on the University of Nebraska football helmet? Nowledge." That was our standard joke and that's about my view but I won't go into it further.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: Actually what Roskens really wanted, and what everyone will tell you, is the following: when he traveled, he just wanted a picture of himself with the President of the country. And, boy, did he harass Missions to get it. That really was disappointing.

As head of DR, I had four divisions of Finance Officers. Superb people like Lew Lucke. I had a great Deputy in Jim Hradsky at one point, and then I had the Technical Offices which included agriculture, education, health, energy, and environment. And so it was pretty large office, I probably had at least 20 Americans who were very professional and very, very good.

Basically you did the kind of work that you do as a backstop office supporting Missions, learning whatever. It was a pleasure when Aaron came back, I could go back and actually run DR. And Aaron was also a wonderful person to be my immediate supervisor and I saw as much of Jim as I did Aaron. In terms of leadership, both of them were extremely good, they were extremely polite. You could take the number three person in your health office with you to his office and Jim would treat that person as though he or she were an equal in terms of background, education, issues, and so on. And with great charm. So it was a terrific work environment at a time where I kind of think USAID was beginning to lose the panache that I felt it had.

Here in my mind are some of the reasons. First of all, I think the LAC Bureau was the last Bureau that really held on to the technical offices in the Bureau rather than transferring them to the Central Bureau.

And my view was that I think it was much better when Bureaus had the technical offices because people in the field and technical offices in the field could then have a direct contact back. And most of the people they were dealing with had been Foreign Service Officers. I think that's very important. It also was a period when I know that over 50 percent of USAID staff were GS (General Schedule), especially in the Central Bureau.

Q: Really?

BLOOM: Yes. Definitely. I remember very clearly that, when I joined USAID, there was the Obey Amendment. David Obey was a Congressman from Wisconsin, who said that 80 percent of USAID people had to be Foreign Service Officers. And that was exactly what happened, and that was exactly what my career basically was. I think USAID lost a lot as more and more people became GS and didn't go overseas. It doesn't mean they weren't good: it doesn't mean they weren't very well educated in their field. But there is a sense of having the experience of being out there day after day after day, and what you are dealing with was more of a sense of reality. As things became more centralized, or they would move things over, it became I think more bureaucratic and more disconnected from the Missions. And I think part of a backstop purpose of Bureaus like LAC or Africa, where John was at one time, and others, is basically to support the Missions.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: You want to do as much of what they want from you as you can in the field. I don't know that you can have quite the feel for it if you haven't already spent time there. So I look at that personally as the beginning of a decline of the Agency. And I'll get to a point where I'll say what I think really caused it. And John will be able to attest to that. But we had very good relations with our desks, and we played our appropriate backstop roles. I did travel around and got to every Central American country but Honduras.

I remember my first trip to El Salvador. I stayed with John Heard and his wife. I think the war was winding down but everything looked so neat and clean and organized. I was thinking to myself, "Wait a minute, this isn't a developing country, Where is the dung, where are the camels, where is the cattle, where is the dirt? I don't understand any of this." And the Mission staff responded, when I asked them those questions, "Are you kidding? There is no time change, I can get the Red Sox, I watch U.S. television."

Well, this will bring me to a different point. I think there was a little thinking about the LAC Bureau by Fred and definitely by Jim Michel. And again, John can attest or should assert himself in this conversation, but the LAC Bureau had the reputation of being very inbred and like a Mafia. People just went from one Mission to another. I think Jim started to feel that it was time to break that pattern and to have people in the LAC area move to some countries in Africa or Asia, or South Asia, or Southeast Asia, and vice versa. It turned out that I was a good vehicle for it in some ways because I knew those countries and could persuade some people, when I would travel out, that, "Hey, you know, life isn't so bad with dung on your feet in India, and commotion and stuff in the Philippines or Indonesia. And issues like the environment and energy are very important."

And to some extent that was the case, but I also could convince some people, who had never been in the LAC Bureau, to change. I think it really became a point where it was the start of the breakup. At least we in USAID always felt the LAC Bureau was a Mafia. But you couldn't necessarily blame them. A lot of the people who went out to the field in

the LAC Bureau probably went out first to LAC as Peace Corps Volunteers, or as young USAID officers. I am sure that at least half of them married Hispanics, who are definitely charming. And they just went from one country to another and the Bureau became very inbred. It doesn't mean it was bad. It was a very good Bureau. And they were very professional officers. But I think it was an agenda that Jim came to, that it would be a benefit to the Agency to move staff to different Bureaus.

So my traveling around was basically as a backstop officer, to get a feel, to get to know the people. Staff get to know you and to have confidence in you. So there are a couple of trips I'd like to describe.

One was to Bolivia. At that point the head of the Project Office was Lew Lucke. He had been in my office heading one of the Finance Divisions in LAC/DR. And I got to La Paz which is at about 12,000 feet, and Lew was an old tennis buddy who said, "Let's play tennis." I said, "Lew, we are at 12,000 feet." He said, "Are you kidding? Get out on the court. We will put a hypodermic needle into the tennis balls and pull out all the air."

Q: What?

BLOOM: Otherwise, the balls would sail miles away.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

BLOOM: And so we played. And we played several times and people said, "You just got off the plane at 12,000 feet and you had asthma and all this, and you're playing tennis with this guy?" And as some of you know, Lew moved up the chain in Bolivia and ultimately became our first Mission Director in Iraq after the invasion and played quite a prominent role.

But then, if you go to Bolivia, you're going to take a trip called the Chapare Safari. In other words, we were trying to do crop substitution to get rid of coca growing.

Q: Right.

BLOOM: And it's an incredible drive from some 12,000 feet in La Paz, right down to where the Amazon is at sea level. You can do it in about two hours. The scenery is incredible. Basically what we were trying to do was to find substitute crops like, in this case, bananas or pineapples. John can understand this, but for farmers it seemed a little strange. At the end of the day we were promising community development, buildings, education, schools, and crop substitution, not realizing how they were going to get their crops out and to the market.

It was interesting riding along at sea level, on the flat down there by the Amazon where the roads were not very developed. Suddenly you'd see what looked like bus stops with big concrete overhangs where one could get out of the sun and wait. And you looked around and you said, "I don't really see any villages, and I don't see any buses, and I

don't see any people moving." And the guy who was taking me around said, "Just wait." And we stopped near one and we walked about ten feet into the woods or the forest or whatever was down there, and what was there? A crashed plane. What had happened was that some military person got the idea that, to stop these small drug planes from landing on the road, you would build these bus stops with cement overhangs, causing these planes to crash. And in fact, it actually happened.

Q: Oh, really?

BLOOM: I have a piece of the plane that I found down there.

Q: Oh, my.

BLOOM*:* But it's an interesting anecdote in terms of what one comes across in this business. And seriously, there were probably ten or twelve 'bus stops' that we passed. They were very serious: at night these planes would land and pick up or drop off their drugs. So it was always on a flat stretch, but you never saw a bus.

And you also realized that efforts at crop substitution which USAID has been trying to do forever in Pakistan and other places, have never been wildly successful.

The other trip which was kind of exciting was to Peru. I think part of why a lot of us like being in USAID is that we are a bit excitement junkies. So we were going to go up into the Upper Huallaga Valley, which is where a lot of the cocaine was grown. So we got into a large plane, a DC-3 or something, without standard seats, but we were sitting on the side. And we rose up over the Andes but there was no oxygen in this plane. So it was the first time in my life that the masks came down, or that somebody brought them down and put a mask on your face. We flew up and over-- and now I know what it's like in case it ever happens on a commercial airplane.

Then we landed in a plateau area which looked to me like it was a kind of a staging area for a war like Viet Nam. They put us in a helicopter which had basically one huge open area that you see in pictures like from the Viet Nam War. There were three of us strapped in, and there was a pilot. Also included was a senior DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) Officer, some Peruvian DEA officials, and I think a couple of pilots from the U.S. who wanted to scare us USAID staff.

We flew over the Upper Huallaga Valley with nothing but this seat belt around you and you were looking down at signs left by the "Sendero Luminoso" (Shining Path), a vicious rebel group against America telling the U.S. to "Go Home". We were flying around looking basically at the areas of where coca was growing. We were trying to do crop substitution, and would promise services to the villages, in building schools, improving roads, and so on. And you realized that, yeah, the farmers bought into it, but they basically kept planting coca on the hillsides because that's really where the money was going to be.

But again, it was one of the more exciting trips I've taken. I think it exemplifies some of the amazing things that can happen to you in a USAID career, like the story I told about riding on the back of elephants in the middle of the jungle in India as though you're part of the Raj. And they are beating for tigers and you're saying, "I'm getting paid to do this?" And this was exciting too. I'm not sure I want to do it again, but it was an interesting trip. In Lima I also managed to have my first -- and second (that was a mistake) -- *pisco sour*. If you've ever had one of those, one is enough. But I did make it back to the hotel.

BLOOM*:* The third trip that was pretty meaningful was to Brasilia, I got a very nice and gracious invitation from one John Pielemeier and Nancy, his wife, to stay at their place. (Thanks, John!) At that point John was our USAID representative in Brazil, in Brasilia. And so I flew down there and basically stayed with John -- and we played tennis and he probably beat me. Anyway, it was a very interesting program. My time there was in Brasilia and also in Salvador, which is beautiful, and also in Rio. But I'm going to turn this over to John because he described to me the other day what the program was and I thought it was very, very good. I knew his predecessor -- I had gone to law school with his predecessor, Howard Helman -- and I knew he had been down there, and I knew how Howard operated. And I think sending John down there was probably a very smart and professional move. He probably did a lot to help that program. So I'm turning this over to John.

Q: Did you have a task on this TDY (Temporary Duty) trip? Were you supposed to review the program or criticize it?

BLOOM: Basically, I was supposed to try to understand it and be able to answer the question: "Why are we in this and how is it going and working?" And when I left Brasilia and John, I was on my own in Salvador and in Rio, and I did find things very interesting. But I prefer to let John tell you what the program was, because it was John's. I'm not sure there were any other American staff, and he was running a pretty darn good program in a huge country which has a certain amount of resources. I don't think it was an easy job to try to do something meaningful in such a large country, with such a diverse population. I think John came up with a good program and since we're talking about the Latin America Bureau and that trip, and I went and looked at the things he had helped put together and design. But go ahead John, why don't you say what you did.

Q: Well, just the context of the activities that Peter would have looked at. We didn't work with the Government at that time because they had a debt to the United States that they had not paid off per USG restrictions. So our assistance was through NGOs, and State Governments. When Peter went to Salvador, he would have looked at our family planning and HIV/AIDS program, which was the largest program in Latin America for USAID.

BLOOM*:* I'll just interrupt to say that I did interview a number of "prostitutes" who were very appreciative of the fact that they were getting assistance to prevent HIV/AIDS. And that's a fact.

Q: Right. Well, it was through intermediary organizations so they probably didn't know USAID was doing it too. Jesse Helms knew it. And then in Rio we had other programs and other activities for Peter to look at, including drug awareness, health and HIV/AIDS programs. Peter did not get up to the Amazon where we had most of our environment programs.

BLOOM: Those were three memorable trips that have stayed with me. I think they're indicative of why a lot of us liked this work. We definitely liked being in overseas posts more than Washington, at least most of us Foreign Service Officers. And I think it was a privilege to be in the countries, frankly. I think USAID people felt that way at the time. And you tried to represent the U.S. as best you could. And I found, at least in the places I went, I liked every post for many different reasons.

But at least, winding up in the LAC Bureau in the last four years of my USAID career, was probably as good a position as I could be in. I had to be in Washington at the time but that was fine because it was so professional and people were so good. Jim Michel was excellent. In fact, even at the end of the time both Roskens and Edelman had left and we had Scott Spangler as the Acting Administrator, He had been the AA (Assistant Administrator) for Africa. And he was a phenomenal person. When he finished business school, he went out to Africa to help work on developing countries until he knew he was having a family and decided he really better come back and earn a good living. He made a fortune and decided that, if he could ever come back and help, he would do it. He was excellent. He was the Acting Administrator, and the Acting Deputy Administrator became Jim Michel. For my money, those two, with the exception of maybe Peter McPherson, were the best managers that USAID could ever have had. And if those two had been the people who were the Administrator and Deputy Administrator during most of the time, I think in terms of leadership, it would have been very satisfying for all of us, both personally and professionally.

I was in the Bureau from 1990 until 1994. But as a Senior Foreign Service Officer you get so many years to make it to the next level. I'd been a Minister Counselor, I would have five years to make it to Career Minister, and that wasn't going to happen. But management at the time decided that it was not going to do something that it had been doing for years, which was to provide Limited Career Extensions (LCEs). And therefore, basically, and maybe John can correct me, there were 100 plus Senior Foreign Service Officers who were let go in the middle of 1994. That was okay for me, I don't think for John, but I'll let him speak for himself because I was ready to go at that point. I knew I wasn't going overseas again. The kids were pretty much finished with high school, and I was ready for something else.

But what I think did happen is that it hollowed out the experiential base of USAID. And even for younger professionals who at one point were saying, "Oh, we're clogged at the top, we want these people to go so we can move up," they began to realize, "We don't have anybody to learn from anymore." And I really think that, together with the fact that we became more than 50 percent GS (General Schedule), we became more centralized and more Bureau than Mission oriented.

I don't know USAID today. It's a different organization, but in terms of the organization that I worked for over 30 years, it started to reach its nadir in the middle of the 1990s. I had a wonderful last four years because I was working for incredible professionals who were very good and were very serious, and I have great admiration for them. Actually, two of my major mentors, two of my major supervisors, Ray Love and Jim Michel, both became head of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) which tells you something about the caliber of the people in USAID then. So I was basically "ticked out." But that was fine.

Q: Time in class.

BLOOM: Time in class, yes, TICed out. But that was fine because I had at least a high three years –that is, we all got a raise in '91 when Congress voted itself a raise in lieu of honoraria. because our salaries had been held down prior to that time. We all got a 28 percent raise in 1991 because we were earning less than we were supposed to, because one couldn't earn more than a Congressman. So three years seemed to be right for a lot of people and '94 seemed to be about the right time. I didn't have a choice but it was okay, though I don't think it was okay for a lot of other people including John. Some of them were overseas, some had kids in school, and USAID was pretty unrelenting. And I can't say that is a favorable way to manage an organization. I think you've got to think much more about the human beings out doing the work in the field.

But for me it was an absolutely wonderful career. I can't thank my friend Steve Isaacs enough for convincing me back in 1967, after two years of being a lawyer, to get into this business. I never felt I had a job during my time working at USAID. I never felt I was working. I just felt it was a way of life. I've made incredible friends, I've worked with incredible people, colleagues, almost to a person. It couldn't be more satisfying and also to this day still having a link to this kind of professional cadre through the USAID Alumni Association (UAA).

And what I'm doing now, in overseas Missions, partly through John and others' efforts in the UAA, is mentoring actual USAID employees by Skype. I'm on my fifth mentee and enjoying it very much. What I learned, though, is that it doesn't help to tell a mentee how good USAID was back then, but really to listen to their issues and problems and try to find ways to help.

In terms of what one thinks about what one could do in life, it was never on my radar. And I wasn't a Peace Corps Volunteer like John or my wife. It was so serendipitous that this happened. By the way, I can tell you where the word comes from. And I can tell you this because of Arthur C. Clarke who wrote about his time in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka was Ceylon, but before Ceylon, the original name given by the Arabs in the 15th or 16th century when they discovered this island by chance, was Serendib, which means 'to discover something by chance'.

Q: Serendib?

BLOOM: Serendib. And that is where the word comes from, and I learned that from a book that Arthur C. Clarke wrote about his life in Sri Lanka. Anyway, it was serendipitous that it happened, and I couldn't have found something more meaningful. I don't think you could measure how much good you did.

I always say that my wife and I -- we both started in Africa in the '60s --if we were graded today on how Africa's doing, I'm not sure what grade we would get. But I don't think that was the point.

There are certainly many things that did work and others that didn't work. The same thing is true for Peace Corps Volunteers. But if you are going to put your effort and time and energies in, I can't think of anything I could have done in my lifetime that would have been more satisfying, whether things worked or didn't work. And to work with such an incredible group of people from all walks of life. So it didn't matter. Nobody asked you what university you went to or anything like that. Plus, the counterparts that you met in your host countries, depending on the country, were important, although it was easier in some countries to stay attached than others.

So all in all, it was highly, highly satisfying. All I can do is hope that people in USAID today can find the same kind of satisfaction. I can't honestly say that I know enough about how the Agency is working, but I can say it was an incredible career and, really, kind of a gift to be able to spend one's time and energy like this.

Q: Well, you still are with your mentoring. If someone came to you who was finishing undergrad or a Master's degree program, who is interested in international work, would you recommend international development and an organization like USAID?

BLOOM: I would definitely recommend international development, there's no question about that. And there are a variety of ways, whether it's with NGOs, or the U.N., or maybe the World Bank. But these institutions are hard to get into. I will make a point, though: a lot of young people come and say, "Well, how do I get into this? I've applied to something and they say that if you haven't been overseas we really can't use you. But how do I get overseas if you don't send me overseas?" We were 35 percent former Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) when I left USAID. And my Mission in Sri Lanka was exactly that, 35 percent former PCVs. I think that's a wonderful place, and entrée.

I can't say I honestly know if it's still a good career. I would tell somebody that they should explore USAID. If you find a place or a position or a possibility that seems appealing, I would definitely say take it and try it. I'm not sure I could say, in all honesty, that it will be a place where you'll want to spend a life or a career. I didn't think that I would either in my first post or two. But as an institution I can't really answer that question. But certainly, if one gets in, with one of the different kinds of entry level positions, if there are opportunities to go overseas, I would say to go in as a Foreign Service Officer.

I would definitely say, "Go for it, and you can decide for yourself how it works out and whether you stay a long time or not. You're going to get an excellent experience and as a base to work in the field." And I want to thank John and the USAID Alumni Association for giving me this opportunity to tell 'my story'.

Q: We're not done. I have another question for you.

BLOOM: Okay, but I do want to thank John and the Alumni Association for including me in this program, because it's a wonderful record that I never would have put together myself.

Q: So after you retired, Peter, you and your lovely wife Gretchen did something that many people would love to do, You moved to Rome and Gretchen also started, or continued, a very important career herself. Could you mention a few things about what Gretchen has been doing?

BLOOM*:* Yes. In fact, it was phenomenal. USAID can be proud that we really initiated the idea of having to focus on women as well. It started in the '70s and we called it Women in Development, with a WID Office. But it morphed into something much more substantial when it moved from being a check list to a requirement for doing gender analysis with a Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy (GEFE) in 2012. Gretchen kind of backed into this in the '90s when we were back in Washington and she was hired by the Asia Bureau and became a Gender Advisor.

Then, when I left USAID in '94, I was wandering around the streets of Washington wondering what to do, and there was a little journal, called the *Overseas Opportunities Bulletin*, which had an advertisement for a post that said, "World Food Programme, Rome, looking for Senior Gender Advisor." So I ripped it out and ran home and said, "Gretchen, go get this job." And she said, "Rome, Italy? I'm not going to Italy if Italians are like those in Providence, Rhode Island (which had been the New England capital of the Mafia), I'm not going to Italy." And I said, "They're not like in Providence." I know Rhode Island is the smallest state, but it has the highest percentage of Italian Americans in the country. It's a very Italian state. And they are different, there's no question. But there's charm in Italian Americans too.

But through some good fortune -- there must have been hundreds of people who applied -- Gretchen got the job to be one of the first Senior Gender Advisors in the World Food Programme. It was going to be for two years. We went in 1998 and we left 17 years later. Now, it wasn't all work. While Gretchen was in Rome, I went to work for part of the time for an organization that two USAID lawyers, Mike Hager and Bill Loris, started, called The International Development Law Organization, which was a very niche organization which unfortunately has gone downhill. But it trained lawyers and judges in developing countries, both in English and in French. And so I was occupied somewhat with IDLO (then IDLI, the International Development Law Institute).

Gretchen was one of the first to hold the position of Senior Gender Advisor at WFP. She worked out of the headquarters in Rome for four years and then ended up spending her last 15 months in Kabul, Afghanistan, heading the WFP Program Office there, never having done anything like that in her life. I couldn't go to Kabul as a dependent, and in theory I couldn't stay in Rome because I was only there by permission as a spouse. But I stayed in Rome anyway.

But the charm of Italy is that you can do anything. For example, you can go the wrong way down a particular street or you could stop at a red light and say, "Oh, that's not meant for me." So nobody bothered me, and for two years at least I was illegal.

But I kept our place going, and I managed to get to Kabul while she was there on a USAID contract to help develop the first Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) Project outside of Africa. I didn't know a lot, but again, here was Ray Love who talked to Roy Stacy, a long-time USAID employee, when he was staying with him in Brittany. Roy was running the project for Chemonics, that had the contract for FEWS, and they called me up and said, "How would you like to go?" I said, "I don't know anything about food security." They said, "Listen, we'll send you the best person there is but we want someone senior to be able to go and talk with the United Nations agencies, and the non-profits, the Government. Well, they did send me and sent someone to whom I would give an A+, Rob Rose, who has remained a friend. He was fantastic.

Meanwhile, Gretchen had 15 months in Afghanistan, in 2002-2003, which was a reasonable time from a security standpoint. I went there for three months in 2003, and we were able to travel in the country. We drove up to Bamiyan with no security whatsoever. It was the place where the Taliban had destroyed the two Buddhist statues. And there were five, or six, or eight, or ten restaurants in Kabul at that time. I was staying at the WFP guest house with Gretchen, hoping to go out to eat every night until she finally said after six days, "Couldn't we just stay home?" So it was different.

But Gretchen, meanwhile, had gotten into a field which now is very professional where one can get graduate degrees in gender studies. It's a major field and every donor has to pay attention to gender issues. As a result, as there are still not that many qualified gender specialists, she gets hired as a gender consultant, often for USAID projects. A lot of young people know Gretchen. And when they say they can't particularly take an assignment, they say, "Why don't you ask Gretchen?" because she'll take anything.

In fact, she spent two weeks in Mozambique on a USAID gender assignment this year and made five trips to Haiti over the past two years. The only time we had been in Mozambique was for the Pan African Hash, that's a crazy running group. You'd have to Google Hash House Harriers to understand it. We were on our way to South Africa to make wine.

It would be very difficult for me to describe what we did for 17 years in Rome, except that we ate and drank well. But we also reconstructed an old farmhouse called a *casale* outside of Rome.

Again, I think there are three areas in development for which the U.S. can take a lot of credit. Other development agencies, including the UN have taken them up, but we really were in the forefront. One is population, without question. Another is the environment, without question, and the third is women's empowerment and gender equality.

And I think the U.S. and USAID can be proud that we were the progenitors of those programs that are now built into all other donor organizations.

Q: Gretchen's experience is not atypical. There are many, many spouses who spent their early years raising kids and basically following their husbands to assignments in the developing world, who gradually found areas where they wanted to work professionally and built up their skills and then after we retired, financed most of our lives with a second career that many of them are still pursuing. And so it's nice to see that happen.

Well Peter, thank you for the interview, I'm going to cut this off.

BLOOM: And I thank you for being a great interlocutor and for having the patience to listen to my stories.

End of interview