

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

ROBERT LYNN BROWN

*Interviewed by: David Reuther
Initial interview date: August 6, 2015
Copyright 2024 ADST*

INTERVIEW

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program interview with Robert Brown. Today is the 6th of August 2015 and this interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am David Reuther. Bob, let us start at the beginning. Can you tell us when and where you were born and we'll talk about your family background.

BROWN: Okay, I was born in Chandler, Arizona, on January 24th, 1931. I was born in what they called a tent house. This was during the Depression and my parents and I were told it had wooden sides up to four feet and attached that to the ceiling. Whenever they had a dust storm or when it was cold they'd lower the flaps down. That's where I was born.

Q: You were born in Arizona but your people had just come up from Mexico?

BROWN: Yes, my parents and my older brother were born in Mexico, in Northern Mexico, but they had come to Arizona before I was born. My father was working as a junior partner in a Chevrolet dealership.

Q: Why was there this group of Mormons down in Mexico?

BROWN: That's a good question, partly because of the polygamy question. Some of the Mormons had been married in polygamy but it had been outlawed by Congress. Some families moved to Canada and some moved to Mexico where it was legal. Together with that there was a general effort to colonize outward from Salt Lake City after the Mormons had actually been chased out of Ohio and Missouri. I found the Mormons settled in Salt Lake and they were sending out colonies in California, Idaho, Utah and Arizona. Some of the people who went to Mexico were polygamists and some were not. My grandparents who went there were not polygamists on my father's side. My great, great, grandfather on my mother's side was a polygamist and he was also part of that colonization. They had seven colonies at one time. They built an academy and they had a strong subculture there in Northern Mexico.

Q: So what was it that brought your folks back to the U.S.?

BROWN: I would probably have to say economic opportunity. They were up in the high mountains and had limited land. It wouldn't support generation after generation so a lot of people came back into the U.S. and went back and forth. I still have relatives down there; they didn't all come out. At the time the Mexican law was that when you turn sixteen you had to declare your citizenship as being U.S. or Mexican. My people, most of them, opted for U.S. citizenship and eventually they came back into the U.S.

Q: Okay. You were born in Arizona so you would be an American citizen but they could have been---

BROWN: Right and my dad who was born in Mexico was also an American citizen because our parents had declared themselves Americans when they turned sixteen.

Q: Is that the mountainous part of Arizona?

Q: Ah, okay. Now as you said you were born at the start of the Depression. They came back and you were born; now I've got it right.

BROWN: Right. That's where Mitt Romney's father was born too.

Q: Your father was a farmer/rancher. What were your mother's people?

BROWN: My mother's family had come originally from Denmark; my father's from Scotland. They were all of the same culture: there they had small farms, some orchards and some livestock, and some ranching. The area became quite famous for its fruit and they used to ship a lot of fruit down to central Mexico from their orchards. They have a big citrus industry that they created.

Q: Okay. We are on the second set returning to our session with Mr. Brown. We were talking about your mother's people. They came from Denmark?

BROWN: They came from Denmark and they joined the Mormon Church heading westward with others from the Salt Lake area into Mexico.

Q: So they were Mormons too?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: What did your mother's people do? Were they ranchers also?

BROWN: They were farmers mostly. I don't think any of them had big spreads but they were farmers.

Q: Okay. So here you are in Arizona; Chandler must be a fairly small town?

BROWN: Yes, it was much smaller then; it was a small town not far from Phoenix.

Q: When would you have started school?

BROWN: I started school in Chandler but I only went there for the first grade. Then my father sold his interest in the Chevrolet dealership and bought a farm in southern Arizona. The farm and ranch area population were between Benson, Arizona and Pomerene, Arizona. I went to school in Benson.

high plateau?

BROWN: No, it's hilly but it's not high. There are hills there and quite a bit of farmland also. Northern Arizona is more mountainous with lots of pines and so forth. Where I grew up was farming country.

Q: Would you have had household chores?

BROWN: Not so much because I had so many outside chores. From the time I was in the second grade we milked cows at four o'clock every morning before school and then after school we had to milk them again and take care of all the calves and livestock. I grew up doing that kind of work. My younger brother helped my mom in the house more.

Q: When World War II started you would have been ten years old.

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Do you remember how that impacted your community?

BROWN: Oh yes. Everything was rationed, gasoline was rationed, sugar was rationed. Tires---. you couldn't get tires for your car even if you had stamps that entitled you to get them. You had trouble finding them. There was a lot of impact. We had air raid drills at school on a regular basis; women couldn't buy nylon hose because all the nylon was being used in parachutes.

Q: So the wartime shortages really impacted.

BROWN: Yeah and if we wanted to buy a Hershey bar once in six months we were lucky; there were shortages of all kinds. Also there was a big drive by the government to plant what they called Victory Gardens to up the food supply. People were urged to buy savings bonds to help finance the war. You had what they called savings bonds that paid interest. After so many years you could cash those in and a lot of people bought those and then used them for their education when they got into college and so forth.

Q: Now would any of your family members have joined the military during this time?

BROWN: One of my brothers joined the military during the Korean War but he didn't ever serve in Korea; he served in Germany for a while.

Q: Now you start high school in September of 1945 so the war has just ended. I suppose that that was a significant change both in the economy and life around that part of Arizona.

BROWN: Right, one of my aunts who was younger was just out of high school; she had gone to California to work in a defense plant riveting airplanes. She was a riveter. There was a popular song called Rosie the Riveter and she was one of them. Lots of young women manned the defense plants because all the men were in the service, all the young ones.

Q: Did that affect the teachers in the high school? Were all the men gone?

BROWN: I'm not aware that it had that much effect; I'm not sure whether teachers were deferred. My father, for example, was deferred because he was a farmer and he was also a Bishop in the Mormon Church. They weren't drafting clergy men or farmers at that time so we were lucky on that score.

Q: Now what would you consider was one of your better subjects in high school?

BROWN: English.

Q: Did you have a favorite teacher?

BROWN: I can't say that I did. In the first two years I moved from Benson to Pomerene and back to Chandler when I was in high school. In Chandler high school I had a couple of teachers that I thought a lot of. One of them was an art teacher and one was a journalism teacher.

Q: That's right, You spent your first two years in Benson high school and the last two in Chandler high school, right?

BROWN: That's right.

Q: Were you much of a sportsman?

BROWN: I tried to be. I was very small and that worked against me. I did junior varsity basketball in Benson and when I transferred to Chandler I made the varsity; I wasn't a starter but I got to play a lot. I love sports. I went out for football but I broke my leg the first week of practice so that ended my football career.

Q: Oh dear.

BROWN: When I went to Chandler they had a State Championship team and I was not experienced so I didn't go out but I wished I had.

Q: After high school you went on to Brigham Young University but were you one of the first from your family to go to college?

BROWN: I was second. My elder had gone to BYU for two years. When I started college he was serving a mission in Argentina so I just took his place in college while he was in Argentina.

Q: Argentina.

BROWN: Yeah, he served a three-year missionary tour in Argentina.

Q: Oh, okay. Was there any particular reason for picking Brigham Young?

BROWN: Well, yes, a couple of reasons. One reason why is that my brother had had such a good experience there and it was a church college. I was very much interested in that aspect. I was offered a scholarship at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona in music and I played in the band. I was offered a scholarship in music at Arizona State but I gave it up in order to go to Brigham Young because that was where I wanted to be.

Q: What was your musical interest?

BROWN: I played the baritone horn sometimes called the euphonium.

Q: You played what? I'm sorry?

BROWN: The horn is called a baritone horn and is about half-way between a French horn and a tuba.

Q: Ah, you were in the brass section.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: Let's see you started at Brigham Young in 1949, is that right?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: So that's basically the same time that the schools are being impacted by all the GIs coming back from the war. Were there a lot of temporary dormitories and that sort of thing?

BROWN: There were actually and there were barracks on every campus. It had _____ students and we had a few class members who lived in the barracks. I had a job as a janitor and I used to clean those barracks for fifty cents an hour, mind you.

Q: That's pretty good. Now a lot of those GIs coming back were married. Was there married housing in and around the campus?

BROWN: Yes, they had a whole village of married students who lived in the barracks. Some were out in the village; there were a lot of them.

Q: I would assume the first year at university is all a list of required courses. You don't get to choose your major or many of your own courses. Was that the case at Brigham Young at that time?

BROWN: Pretty much. I had a few electives but mostly I had classes with these groups. You were put in groups that required classes. For electives I took Spanish and ended up majoring in Spanish eventually. I didn't choose my major for sure until I was a junior.

Q: Ah ha, you were experimenting.

BROWN: Right. I left out humanities. I didn't like the sciences that much at that time. I ended up doing Spanish and that stayed with me the rest of my life.

Q: Well, excellent. You must have taken some history courses or government courses. Was there any---

BROWN: We had American government and history.

Q: In this case was there a particular professor that still stands out in your memory?

BROWN: Not really. I was also in vocal music and I would get into an *acapella* choir. I was very, very impressed with the leader of that group. I always had a preference for English. I liked writing; I liked reading.

Q: Now you get into university just at the time the Korean War breaks out.

BROWN: Right.

Q: Did that make much of an impact on the campus? Was that something people talked about?

BROWN: The most visible effect it had was that there was a large group of ROTC. This Reserve Officer Training Corps trained people on campus. I never got involved in that but it was very visible and very active on campus; my brother was drafted right out of college during the Korean War.

Q: You graduated with a BA, Bachelor of Arts, in June of '53.

BROWN: Yes.

Q: What did you do after the bachelor's degree?

BROWN: I was able to get a deferment from the draft because of my grades. I was able to go ahead and do a little graduate school. I took a two-year program in Spanish literature and linguistics with the understanding that I would be drafted after I graduated. I had gotten married on the same day I graduated with my bachelor's degree and by the time I finished graduate school I had a son. So when I was expecting to go into the military, I was struggling to finish my graduate thesis. They weren't drafting fathers anymore. I had about six weeks to find a teaching job and I was pretty frantic. I finally found one down in ____ Arizona. It was a militant mining town that I'd never heard of even though I had grown up in Arizona.

Q: Now what part of Arizona is that in? Is it in the south?

BROWN: Well, it is close to Tucson. It's a little south of central Arizona; it was a small town created just to support the new mining operation. It was a brand new school, brand new town and a brand new life for me and my young family.

Q: You were hired as the Spanish language teacher?

BROWN: Yes, the Spanish department and I headed a one-man Spanish Department and I taught English occasionally.

Q: If it was a small high school you probably were also a sports coach and probably taught a couple of other courses.

BROWN: I coached freshman basketball for one year but I found that it was pretty exhausting because I was involved in a lot of church work at the same time. I was teaching and I was driving the school bus. Then whenever they had a sports team involved in a game out of town I drove a bus either for the team or for the rooters to get to those games. It was a pretty busy life.

Q: Yeah, the towns would be pretty far apart in that part of the state too so that's quite a bit of driving.

BROWN: Yep.

Q: While you were at San Manuel High you mentioned that you became active in the American Association of Teachers in Spanish and Portuguese. Is that a professional organization you would have joined while you were at university?

BROWN: No, it's a teacher's organization. It was almost totally populated by university teachers but I was ambitious and I joined it. I discovered that they had a program for a high school Spanish Honor Society. So I started a chapter and I was the first one in the southwest part of the U.S. I became a pioneer in that movement and encouraged some

other schools in Arizona and Utah and California to join. I became the vice-president of the American Association of Teachers in Spanish and Portuguese in the state while I was teaching at this dinky high school. Kind of crazy.

Q: You brought great fame to that modest high school.

BROWN: It was a good school but it was not very big.

Q: Actually let me ask. How big of a school was it? How many students and how many teachers?

BROWN: I think there were 125 students, everybody knew everybody. I don't remember how many teachers.

Q: You were saying you were also active in the church. Was the whole community pretty much Mormon?

BROWN: No, it wasn't what you would call a Mormon community; there were some of those in Arizona. We had a solid congregation there and I was head of that for seven or eight years. I served as the lay bishop. In fact, being an elder of the church along with my school work kept me really busy.

Q: Now, if you are in that part of the southwest there are probably native Spanish speakers in the community. Did you have any interaction with them?

BROWN: I surely did. About one-fourth of my students spoke Spanish at home and I found that teaching them together with the Anglo students their needs were quite different. There were still plenty of things that they needed to know. They didn't need the drilling and some of the stuff that the Anglo kids needed so I proposed to the school superintendent and principal that we put them in a special class, an accelerated class. They resisted that because they thought it would look like segregation. After two years I convinced them that it was not segregation but ability grouping and they let me try it. I condensed the first three years of Spanish into one year for those people and that program caught on. Several other high schools adopted it before I left for the Foreign Service. I don't know how far it got after that. I was invited to give a talk at the State Convention on NEA, the National Education Association. I talked about that program and that's when I found out a number of other schools had adopted it later.

Q: You were teaching in high school from '55 to '66; that is actually eleven years or so. During this time any number of things were happening and I'm wondering how they impacted on your high school or you. The first thing I'm thinking of is the start of the Civil Rights movement with James Meredith entering Ole Miss in 1962. Of course, that made the news.

BROWN: Yes, it didn't have much of an impact on me. I remember that period and all the controversy and stir about it but it didn't affect our school situation to any memorable degree.

Q: Another event at that time, of course, was the Kennedy assassination in November '63. You would have been in a classroom.

BROWN: I was in the classroom when the announcement came over the public address system that he had been shot but it wasn't certain what the outcome was. There was just total silence and the front office kept us to make it through the day---through the news on the radio. Within a very short time we learned that he had been killed and so I listened to what was said in my classroom. I didn't speak. I wrote on the blackboard, "what other feelings can you give to America on the assassination of their president." I invited them to write their thoughts before they were dismissed to go home. A lot of them wrote their thoughts and left them with me. It was a very moving thing and I was impressed with the things that they wrote. Unfortunately, I didn't keep those notes; I gave them all to the principal. I wished later that I had kept copies because it was a historic and very emotional moment.

Q: About this time Viet Nam is coming to people's attention. Now you are in a small high school in the southwest probably not paying much attention to that part of the world I suspect.

BROWN: It was constantly in the news. I wasn't involved in any direct way. There weren't that many people being drafted or anything as I recall. It was just that the war was just continuing. Also the controversy was about the generation that was history and was demonstrating in the anti-war mode. There were no demonstrations in our part of the world.

Q: Let's get to your USIA career. In 1966---let me ask this: how did this come about that you turned from high school teacher of Spanish language and literature to taking a job with USIA?

BROWN: It was an unintended consequence of an act of Congress; there are a lot of those, aren't there? Congress passed this bill called the National Defense Education Act and it was giving a special summer seminar for teachers of science, math and language. I never could figure out how language was going to help us catch up with the Russians in this Sputnik thing; that's what triggered this: the Russian Sputnik. Anyway, I was quick to take advantage of that opportunity and I spent a wonderful summer at UCLA in 1960.

Then a few years later they did an advanced level in Guadalajara, Mexico. I was one of four teachers from Arizona who was qualified to go to that summer institute. I think it was eight or twelve weeks in Guadalajara. In Guadalajara the base for our studies was called a binational center. It was a center that operated independently of the U.S. government but it had government support in the form of a director and probably an academic director. It was governed by a local board of expatriate Americans and natives

from the local society. I was so impressed with what was going on there, besides our conference at the institute, that a couple of years later I saw that the government was recruiting people to work in these centers throughout the world. They had popped up all over Latin America and some of them in Europe.

I jumped at that; I was very eager to either get a college position or an overseas position and this is what turned up. I applied for it and by some kind of miracle I got it. That's how I got into the Foreign Service. Now that was not legitimate Foreign Service but we worked very closely with the embassies in those cities and those towns where these centers were operating. We were governed by the embassy as well as the Foreign Service people. After I had done a couple successful tours I was able to take an oral exam which was something like a Meyers-Briggs and got into the Foreign Service. I got in the back door of the U.S. Foreign Service actually and never took the normal tests people had to take to get in.

Q: So to start all over again you responded to this ad and did you have to write an essay or be interviewed?

BROWN: I was interviewed by a representative from Washington who went around the country interviewing candidates. I don't remember the nature of the application I filled out but I'm sure that was part of it. Then I got the interview and got a telephone call in December; I believe it was. They were saying they had an opening for me in Baghdad, Iraq, would I take it? I said, "I'm available June 1st and yes, I'd like to take it. Where is Baghdad?" They said, "It's the capital of Iraq but we need you in January." I talked to the school and they agreed to release me from my contract if I could find a replacement which I did. So they released me and I went to Iraq with five little kids.

Q: The interview, was that done in Arizona or did you go to Los Angeles or someplace else?

BROWN: I went to Phoenix, not too far from where I lived.

Q: You went to Phoenix. Well, once you accepted their offer of Baghdad how lucky. What was then the next step? Was there some sort of introductory course in USIA procedures?

BROWN: It took us three months in Washington in training; there was a group of us going to different parts of the world. We had training on the areas we were going to. We had a little bit of language training but we didn't get a lot because we were going to run an English teaching program so that learning a foreign language was not a big deal. I learned some generic Arabic but I was never able to converse in Arabic. Anyway, we had some very, very good Arabist studies about that strange part of the world. You can imagine that there was a lot to learn about the Middle East.

Q: Right, now were you brought to Washington for this training?

BROWN: Yes, yes, we were in Washington for a few months before we went to our posts overseas. A strange thing happened there---there were about thirteen of us in the group and there were only three of us who spoke Spanish and two of us were sent to Iraq. The other was sent to Bangkok. Of all the people sent to a Spanish position none of them spoke Spanish. We thought that was kind of crazy.

Q: Welcome to the government.

BROWN: Yeah, welcome to the government.

Q: The training class---how many people were in it?

BROWN: As I recall about thirteen. It could have been eighteen but less than twenty.

Q: Do you recall anybody that was in the class with you?

BROWN: Well, the other teacher from Arizona was also a member of the Mormon Church; we hooked up right away and we went to Baghdad together. We have been friends all these years. We had another chance to work together after we were kicked out of Baghdad. I landed in Colombia and he landed in Venezuela. Our church organized a function by combining those two countries. We both volunteered to assist with that work. So every month we had a meeting in one place or the other so we got work ourselves and stayed very close all these years.

Q: Now your assignment is Baghdad so you arrive in Baghdad around May of 1966. Is that right?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: At that time how did one go to Baghdad?

BROWN: We had a stopover in London overnight and then on to Baghdad.

Q: I'm sorry---a stopover where?

BROWN: I don't remember if it was Pan Am but we flew in on an American carrier.

Q: There were air connections between Washington and Baghdad?

BROWN: At that time there were---yes, there were flights.

Q: Now did you go straight to Baghdad or take a couple of days here or a couple of days there?

BROWN: Nope, just the overnight in London on the way.

Q: Overnight in London, okay. Before you had gone were you introduced to any of the State Department people that would be responsible for Baghdad?

BROWN: Not in Washington.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: We were met by all of them in Baghdad when we arrived. There were the representatives of USIA and State Department to meet us. I met the ambassador the next day. We worked very closely with him and the officers; we had a language institute in the city so we didn't actually work in the embassy. I was in charge of courses and the other fellow that I talked about was my assistant director and his name was Robert Gibbons.

Q: You and Mr. Gibbons were the American staff of the Binational Center in Baghdad. Now you said you were in a separate building from the embassy; was it a large distance?

BROWN: No; it was across town. I mean it wasn't that far; they were completely separate operations.

Q: The Binational Center concept is one where local people and the U.S. are running this; it lives on its fees. Who were some of the local Iraqis that you might have been working with?

BROWN: As you say these centers typically were governed by a board of directors which was made up of expatriate Americans and Iraqis or local important people. I would never have had any contact with a local board in Baghdad. I did in other countries later. I'm not sure I can't give you the name of anyone in Iraq who served in that way. The president at the time was President Arif and his brother actually took English classes in our school.

Q: Huh.

BROWN: We had students from the Russian Embassy, a fairly nice crew studying English.

Q: Now what is your relationship with the Public Affairs Officer Kilgore, I believe, Andy Kilgore?

BROWN: He was our boss. We had a director at the center, there was a director and then director and an assistant director; there were three of us. We reported to Andy Kilgore and he was a good man to work with. He didn't bother us; he gave us a fair job and they knew what we were going and everything worked out well. I had a very favorable cultural affairs officer also; I think his name was Shaun, Shaun Jones, if I remember. So we had good support and a good time; we adjusted to the culture but we had to move thirteen months later when they kicked us out.

Q: Right, I would think that the temperature and heat of Baghdad was probably fairly similar to what you knew in Arizona?

BROWN: Pretty much, very similar. It was a few degrees hotter. They'd say if you wanted to bake bread you could just roll up the windows of your car. put it in your car and set it on the sidewalk and you could bake bread; 110 degrees was not uncommon in Baghdad.

Q: You were new to the post; you were new to USIA. Would you have had much contact with Ambassador Strong? interacted with him?

BROWN: Well, not a lot but there wasn't a call for it. We attended a few events and we were invited to a few Embassy events that he attended. He was very supportive but I didn't have as much time with him as I did with some of the other ambassadors later. He received us in his office the morning after we arrived and welcomed us and we got to work so to speak.

Q: The primary thing that happened during this tour was on June 10, 1967 when war broke out in the Middle East between Israel and the Arab countries.

BROWN: Right.

Q: How did that impact your program?

BROWN: We had half a day's notice to get out of town, get out of the country. I got a call from the embassy telling me I needed to come to the office and get a birth certificate for my son who had been born there. When I got to the embassy they told me that the real reason they called me in, although I did need the birth certificate, was that they were under orders to leave at midnight with one suitcase each. We were being shipped out. So we went out in a bus caravan and they wouldn't let airplanes come in to pick us up. The Iraqi government wouldn't permit that so they gave us a military escort to the border at Khanaqin and we went to Tehran for safe haven.

Q: So was the convoy from Baghdad into Tehran?

BROWN: Yes, Bob Gibbons and I could only take one suitcase each and we had to move our cars into the embassy compound. When we got there they decided which cars parked and which we were going to drive out. We asked about it and they said the security people didn't know what our clearance was so they didn't know how to treat us. So they treated us as if we were non-official. We complained to the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) who was there with us . He said you can take your car but we had no chance to go back to our homes and take things out of our house and take it with us. That was the story there so we did drive our cars out to Tehran. We were there for a month. We were able to sell our cars there before we were shipped to our next post.

Q: Now how did your wife and family react to this sudden turn of events?

BROWN: Like sheep, we did what we were told and nobody ever got real panicky, so we didn't panic. Somebody rested part of the time and part of the time they were driving with us. It took us a long time to go across the border because neither one of those countries trusted the other country so we had to go through a lot of hoops on both sides of the border. It took us a good part of a day and then we arrived in the afternoon at an air base in Iran. It was still quite a ways from Tehran. They flew the families in from there but those of us who had cars stayed overnight at the air base and then drove the next day to Tehran. In Tehran the embassy had set up tents in the embassy compound to hold all the refugees coming in from everywhere. Most people stayed for a while in these tents. Then we were placed there but there happened to be a couple of Mormon families in the Mission so they took us in and put us in some tents. After that we went to a hotel instead because it was just too much of a hassle to be at the residence where people had taken us in.

Q: I would assume that Tehran then was a safe haven to a lot of other embassies. I mean from the Gulf and what not?

BROWN: Yeah, there were people there from Syria, I think, Lebanon, Jordan. From every place that was evacuated there were a lot of people. Some of them were very quickly moved on and others stayed longer.

Q: What ultimately happened to your personal effects back in your house in Baghdad?

BROWN: That's a good question. We actually were able to insure our household after we got to Baghdad, from memory. We wrote down everything that we could remember and insured it and they accepted that. Eventually it followed us to Colombia where we ended up. We got reimbursed. Most of our things eventually came---I think---about nine months later after we were in Bogotá, Colombia.

Q: So how long were you in safe haven status in Tehran?

BROWN: One month. We had very good relations between the Shah and the U.S. at that time; it's quite different now.

Q: Aha. Now when you left Tehran did you leave on commercial flights or U.S. military flights?

BROWN: Commercial with a stopover in Rome on our way to Washington.

Q: How big was your family at this time? Two children?

BROWN: No, six. We arrived in Baghdad with five and left with six.

Q: Well, you got something out of the assignment. There you are.

BROWN: Right, my youngest son's name is Jed Jamal because he was born at the Tower of Babel.

Q: What day did you leave Tehran? Or let me turn it around: what day did you finally arrive in Washington, D.C. in 1967?

BROWN: I can answer both of those questions; it was July 4th, 1967. The reason it was the same day was because of the date line. It took two days to get there but we left on July 4th and we arrived on July 4th in time to see the fireworks on the Potomac as we landed at National Airport.

Q: Okay. By the time you arrived in Washington did you know what your onward assignment was going to be?

BROWN: Yes. We knew it was going to be Bogota. Strangely enough they wanted me to stay in Washington for two days or so of consultations and they wanted my family to go to Bogotá. We raised a little stink about that and they finally let my family stay as well. We went together to Bogota after a few days' consultation in Washington.

Q: Okay. You are going to be in Bogota for how many years?

BROWN: Bogota was three and a half, I think.

Q: Three and a half.

BROWN: We got there in '67 and left in late 1969, I think.

Q: Right. I'll tell you what. Since that is such a long period of time, why don't we break off today and pick this up later?

BROWN: You tell me when to pick up.

Q: Today is the 1st of September 2015 and we are returning to our conversation with Robert Brown who had an outstanding USIA career. Now Robert when we left your brilliant career in the Middle East had been cut short.

BROWN: Yeah.

Q: And you came back to Washington and you were reassigned to Bogota.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: Your background is Spanish language and whatnot so that must have been a welcome change for you. How did you exactly get this assignment?

BROWN: Well, I thought that's where I should have gone in the first place instead of to Baghdad but you know Uncle Sam has his own ideas. I got the assignment while I was stationed in Tehran and then in waiting mode for one month.

Elizabeth Hopkins was running the Binational Center (BNC) program and she was under pressure to get everybody that was held up there from the BNC programs reassigned. I drew Bogota, I just got lucky. I don't know why I got Bogota; my best friend who is also a Spanish teacher with me in Iraq got Caracas so we were happy to be that close together.

Q: Well, that's fine. Before you arrived in Bogota and you were preparing in Washington, what were you told were going to be your duties?

BROWN: I was going to be the director of courses at the large BNC. Also I was going to be assistant cultural affairs officer because they were here to give teaching advice and support to all of the local universities and other English teaching operations on behalf of the embassy.

Q: Was this a fairly large and important program?

BROWN: Bogota BNC was one of the biggest and best in the continent at that time; they had about 4,000 students when I took over; Caracas and Bogota were both top tier BNCs at that time.

Q: Now when you arrived at post, who was in charge of your administrative affairs? Would that be the embassy admin section or did USIA have its own admin officers?

BROWN: We had an admin officer of our own because it was a difficult job but he was a very good executive officer and we had good support.

Q: The Binational Center that you were supervising---how many USIA people were assigned there?

BROWN: There were three at the time I took over. Three of the six positions had been eliminated by the time I left. So only the director's slot remained.

Q: What was the Binational Center supposed to do?

BROWN: The Binational Center was supposed to teach English. That was their main activities and the income from English teaching was supposed to support a cultural program. We had art exhibits, we had speakers, occasionally, but mainly we tried to bring people into the center to see the two cultures side-by-side. We wanted to get better acquainted with the arts to see if local people would become better acquainted with our culture. Especially we wanted Americans to become more familiar with the local culture. There were obviously quite a few expats around.

Q: Now one of the things I am trying to understand is does the Binational Center have its own cultural programs or is it committed to USIA visiting speakers and visiting lecturers.

BROWN: We had exhibits. We had some art galleries so we had exhibits both in local Colombian and from Americans.

Q: You actually had some Independence from the embassy's USIA program?

BTOWN: That's right the Binational Centers started autonomously. People just got together in each other's countries, expatriate Americans with prominent local citizens, and set up these centers just for sharing information and they were definitely autonomous. What happened was that the government people noticed what they were doing and said, "Hey, this has merit, let's give them some support." So they started sending support people and, in some cases, cash grants to help them operate. Then it started springing up all over the world.

Q: These were English classes and exposure to American culture that you are doing. Does the student get a certificate that he has completed a year of English training or something like that?

BROWN: Yes, we had a basic English program to which there was a graduation. We had special English classes where you just get a certificate. I made English for banking, and English for airline pilots. They had a mix of classes like that where the certificates went according to what the course was. We also had a full time bilingual secretarial program going and these gals were in great demand, the bilingual secretaries. Some of them were hired out in executive level salaries after they graduated.

Q: You were quite integrated in the economy, producing English speakers that were useful all over the place.

BROWN: Right.

Q: Now it's a binational center so the Colombians serve on the board and are important to the money raising.

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Does this mean that you had the opportunity to visit a number of the universities in town and get to know a certain section of Colombian society?

BROWN: Very much so and not only this in the universities but we had a variety of official relationships. In one case, we actually helped a university set up its own English teaching program for local students. In another case we provided teachers to teach on campus English as a foreign language before they set up their own programs. We also had contracts with secondary schools where we'd bring their students in by bus to study

English while they were still trying to hire their own teachers. We did a lot of things in that regard.

Q: When you would have exhibits and whatnot to send out invitations you got a pretty good response to some of the programs, some of the cultural programs that you were doing?

BROWN: Yes, the Binational Center was very well known. It was very visible in the community and we had a very good response from the upper middle class people and from the student and university population among our targets.

Q: Now how many Binational Cultural Centers were there in Colombia at this time; we're talking 1967?

BROWN: Okay we had one in Manizales, Pereira, Cali, Medellin and Bucaramanga and there was one in the north.

Q: Did you and the Binational Center directors get together from time to time to share experiences?

BROWN: Yes and, in fact, we had an embassy officer whose job was to coordinate all of the different BNCs in the country, coordinate our activities and just be sure everything was running properly.

Q: At the embassy there would also be a USIA officer?

BROWN: It was a USIA officer.

Q: Do you recall who that was?

BROWN: Years later that was opened again. That office was one of the openings that I was applying for a job for my next assignment..

Q Now one of the major bilateral programs was the Fulbright Exchange Program. Was there one in Colombia and were you involved in selecting people for that?

BROWN: Yes. We did all the testing for Fulbrighters going north to the U.S. We did the graduate record exam. (GRE); we gave special exams for the medical students, especially the medical exam for prospective medical students. We didn't have a lot of people coming to Colombia on the program but we had a lot to do with the ones who were going to the U.S. In other countries I had more to do with some of the Americans coming to work than in other countries.

Q: The head of the USIA at that time was Walter Bastian. I think he was there for most---

BROWN: Most of the time, yes.

Q: ---of the time. What was he like to work for?

BROWN: That's a good question. He was an outspoken person and you knew where he stood. He let you know if he didn't agree with something. I got along with him okay but I guess I just knew what he wanted and tried to talk about it. I wouldn't say that he was an easy person to work for but he was serious. You knew he meant business. He wanted to get the job done and there was no trouble.

Q: At the time you were in Colombia so this was about '67 to about '70. Outside of the area the Viet Nam War is going on. _____ of America has a certain attitude toward the United States. Were there any anti-war student demonstrations or did that even impact any of your programs?

BROWN: No, it didn't go down there. They weren't paying much attention I don't think. At least the people we dealt with weren't.

Q: While you were there you served under two ambassadors. I think when you first arrived Ambassador Randal Carlson was there and then he was replaced in 1969 by Jack Vaughn. Did you have an opportunity to interact with these two ambassadors?

BROWN: Nobody messed with Carlson. I remember one meeting with him but I had quite a bit more contact with Jack Vaughn. He was more of a mixer. He had a background in rock singing and he was a very colorful and interesting guy. _____ ambassador to Bogota. He was an actor and he was not satisfied with the support that he got from Washington.

Q: Were both these people Latin American hands?

BROWN: I think they were both political appointees. I don't think either one of them was a specialist in Latin America except that they went about the job.

Q: Moving down through the embassy would you have had much interaction with the DCM?

BROWN: We attended their weekly meetings and so we had that level. We didn't matter much in our operations so there wasn't very much contact. We did meet in the embassy staff meetings as they had USIS staff meetings every week so we were very much part of the country team. One of the issues that was more relevant to us was the racial stuff that was going on in the U.S. at that time.

There was one staff meeting where we were discussing what we could do to help explain the progress that was being made in the U.S. That was Jack and Hap Martin, who was the executive officer. He was Black. He made a statement that none of us ever forgot. In the middle of this discussion he said, "Thank God for slavery." That gave us something to think about. He said, "We were so much better off as a Foreign Service officer; I dipped

my hand in the diplomatic service of the U.S. I could have been in any other place and might have still been in Africa.”

Q: You were there in 1969 and that's a change of administrations in Washington. Did the transition to the Nixon administration particularly affect your programs?

BROWN: Not that I recall. There are times when you could tell which party was in charge in Washington but most of the time we weren't very conscious of that.

Q: Let me ask this: what did you think of what we do? How was the work-home balance at post? Did you have a chance to travel around the country?

BROWN: I had a certain responsibility for supporting the English teaching opportunities and the administration of various sections, the English departments about and around the country. I did get to travel occasionally. I didn't travel a lot but I had occasion to go to all the different BNCs at different times.

Q: Was it possible to just jump in the car and drive off for a weekend somewhere?

BROWN: Not normally. There weren't that many places to go anywhere close to get out of town. It was so mountainous that we flew wherever we were going because there weren't always good roads to get there; it was a very mountainous country. Travel was difficult so air traffic was the main way of getting between cities.

Q: There wasn't any particular security problem at that time was there?

BROWN: Not like there was later but there was definitely a security problem in terms of pick pocketing, burglaries and car thefts.

Q: Hm.

BROWN: But the drug problem hadn't started up yet. There is one story I should tell you. My boss, Roger Hinckley, got a call from somebody you could tell was threatening him on some level, trying to get some kind of commitment from him. He was warned if he didn't comply he would feel the repercussions. He told the guy to go to hell because he didn't believe they could do anything. The next morning his bicycle, which was chained and locked to the wall inside of his garage which was double locked, was missing. He reported that to the embassy and the security people moved him to a different house that very night and put surveillance on his house for a time; the threat was considered that serious. They had a lot of security problems. I had my windshield stolen out of my car one night; it was sitting on the street. Small-time robbery, pick pocketing was everywhere and house-breaking was not uncommon. My house was actually broken into twice.

Q: While you were in it or absent?

BROWN: Yes, while I was in it. That was one time and the other time was different.

Q: One of the big cultural events every year was going to be the American July 4th party. I would assume the BNC would be part of the preparations, volunteering for whatever was sold or whatnot. Was there a big 4th of July event in those years you were there?

BROWN: Not in Bogota. There's a very big deal in Brazil but in Bogota I have no memory of any 4th of July celebration that was sponsored by the embassy or the BNC.

Q: Not a hotel reception sort of thing?

BROWN: The ambassador may have done something, probably at a higher official level that didn't involve us as much. I have no recollection of anything.

Q: Okay. Now 1970 comes up, the Nixon administration has been in a year and USIA goes through a reduction in force.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: In which people---

BROWN: ---my position was eliminated at that time.

Q: People were fired.

BROWN: My tour was cut short by a year or so.

Q: How were you informed that you would be the subject of a reduction in force?

BROWN: My recollection is Walter Bastion told us in a staff meeting.

Q: How much time did you have before this would take effect?

BROWN: It wasn't immediate. I don't remember if it was just weeks or a few months. It wasn't immediate.

Q: Now in your understanding of what positions were chosen to be reduced, did Bogota have any input in that decision or was that just a Washington order: you've got to cut three slots, four people or whatever?

BROWN: I can't be sure Walter Bastion had a voice in it but if he did we weren't aware of it. It was just handed down as far as what I was able to observe.

Q: It's disruptive I would suppose. Here you are planning events and whatnot and sudden---

BROWN: Yes, actually Walter Hinckley, my director, was fired. They laid off a bunch of people at that time and he was one of them.

Q: That impacts planning.

BROWN: Yeah, it affected some people very drastically. I drew a Washington assignment so it didn't affect me. I was particularly fortunate.

Q: That's an interesting point. Under RIFT (Reduction in Force Team) you could have been dropped, thanked and sent back to the States. In this case you were able to get another assignment.

BROWN: Yes, I was assigned to the English teaching division in Washington.

Q: How did that come up? Was somebody saying, "We've got this fabulous Brown guy in Bogota; we don't want to lose him?"

BROWN: I don't know what they fed each other in Washington. I just got orders to change assignments and report to _____ Street in Washington, D.C.

Q: Okay, well let's talk about USIA in Washington. How soon did you have to leave Bogota? Sort of the normal summer turnover or a little more quickly than that?

BROWN: I'm just trying to remember but I think it probably was when school ended and we got the kids out of school---it wasn't disruptive in the sense that the kids were jerked out of school or anything like that so it must have been the summer.

Q: Okay, now you were the regional English teaching officer for Latin America. Can you give us a sense of where that office stood in the USIA organization? I guess I'm asking who was your boss? Who was his boss? What did the organizational ladder look like?

BROWN: It was an office within the English teaching division. I'm trying to look at my notes here and see if I can remember the names of people. I had about three levels of bosses in Washington at that time. They would send me out to conduct seminars for local English teachers in various countries several weeks at a time.

Q: Okay, now the English teaching division was part of what bureau or what was---

BROWN: Let me think. I think it was part of the Arts in America. I think it was later that I was in Arts in America.

Q: Let's put a marker at this point in the conversation because a lot of people looking at these oral histories will be familiar with State Department organizations. The China desk is in the East Asia Bureau, that sort of thing. But our understanding of USIA is not as precise and that is why I am asking this. Why don't we leave it here? You can talk to the

guys there in the Wednesday lunch. Scope out and add in and to the transcript some description of where this office sat, if you will.

Now let's go to your duties. You're saying you've conducted a series of trips through South and Central America directing seminars for local teachers?

BROWN: Right.

Q: So that puts you on the road a lot?

BROWN: Absolutely. I was on the road more than half the time during that whole assignment. I was on the road three-fourth of the time and one of my trips was a ten-week trip. My wife and family were stranded in a motel while the house that we were buying was being finished. There was a transportation problem. It was a tough time to be gone that much. Even though I enjoyed working with the people on that assignment, and I had some very good experiences, we jumped at the first chance to be given a different assignment. I was putting on a seminar in Recife, Brazil, and I got a telegram to call my office. So I finally got through to the office and they said, "How would you like to go to Jakarta? There's a BNC there that's about to close and we want to try and save it. Would you take that position?" I said, "Yeah, where's Jakarta?" I didn't even know where it was but I was willing to take it to get away from that assignment that made me gone so long from home.

Q: Now what were your duties in directing these seminars?

BROWN: The local BNCs would set up the administrative work, and you got the teacher. You made a selection of who was going to be there and then I would be informed about what kind of lectures were needed from me, e.g., linguistics, methodology. Sometimes they were lectures to groups of one hundred people; other times more often it was small workshops that I would give. So it was a very interesting time. I liked it; I liked the work but I just didn't like being away for all that time.

Q: You would have had the opportunity then to analyze or review the quality of the Binational Centers all over South and Latin America. Who do you think had the better program? Was there one country that really was outstanding?

BROWN: That's a good question. Bogota, of course, was outstanding; Brazil had some high and low points. I got a lot of criticism from Brazil. Part of my job was between seminars, I was invited to many social functions to address all the BNCs in the country. I made recommendations and comments about relations. The big heads in Brazil didn't like what I said about some of their relations. There was an exchange of telegrams between Washington and my office about that. It was interesting. This was at a time when the course was being shifted. The Binational Centers were starting to be looked at and the value of English teaching was beginning to be seen as a very good source of income to support other programs. It stopped being the main emphasis. Recognizing the cultural content of learning any foreign language was forgotten by some of the big shots in

Washington. They were trying to create a more sophisticated program as they would put it. Perhaps they were telling us to use a more high-powered level of propaganda and less of the national cultural ineffective language study that went with that. I messed up and our leaders would be coming to Sao Paulo, for example, and said so. In Brazil they didn't like that a bit.

Q: Was there a Binational Center in the capital Brasilia?

BROWN: They had an international center that was bi-national but it was different in some ways. It considered itself really to be a BNC for some reason. I can't find words to describe the difference. It was a very good institute and invaluable. It was an information center that taught English. They stressed the library more and certain other things. They did the English teaching.

Q: Since you were able to see so many binational Centers, were there some that were having problems acquiring the necessary teaching staff?

BROWN: Yes. That was sometimes the problem and there was always a felt need to have more native speakers teaching the language. They could get local people but locals didn't have the natural accent and the deeper knowledge of English. So we tried to have as many native speakers as we could get. In order to improve this ratio while I was in Colombia we had a small program of what do you call it? We would recruit recent graduates in the capital who had degrees in the field. We invited them to come on a teaching scholarship to teach for a year in Colombia and other different Binational Cultural Centers. We extended that program so that our locals in the country would get help from it and at that time the agency asked me to write up the program in such a way that they could make it available to all other BNCs in different countries to improve their ratio of English teachers with native language skills.

Q: Anyway, in 1972 you get this telegram saying we have a problem in Jakarta, come and fix it; you accepted that offer. What did you understand, sitting on the Washington side, was the problem that they were trying to correct?

BROWN: At the time I accepted it I didn't know. When I got to Washington I found out what was happening. What happened was they had a very bad young black girl assigned as the director of courses to BNC. She had a lot of bright ideas but somehow she was a threat to the local hierarchy. One of the problems was there was already a middle-aged woman there who had the title of director of courses and she blocked everything this young woman tried to do. It was so serious that the USIA officer resigned or she took a temporary leave of office from the agency because she couldn't deal with the blockage she was getting. That's why they asked for a middle-aged male to try to train, educate, and guide these women who were directors of courses. The first thing I did was I told Washington that I insisted that I have a different title. Next I insisted that I was not going to go down there as director of courses when they already had one.

Q: Now this woman was a USIA employee or local hire?

BROWN: She was a local hire; she was Indonesian and she was pretty good at her job. She was capable and ran a good shop but Indonesia is such a---I don't know how to describe their society---at one point I said that, "There is no private life in Indonesia that is not culturally sensitive." For example: when you have a garden party, a buffet dinner, none of the teachers, and we had about eighty teachers, none of them would have even gone near the good table until the Directora had gotten her food and sat down.

Then the teachers went to the table. There was an unwritten hierarchy, which took me a while to get on to and appreciate. I had connected enough dots before I went that I had a pretty good idea of what I had to do. I realized I had to work with these people instead of telling them what to do. I sorted out the problems that needed to be fixed. I would start out by asking them questions about what's the problem, why we have it and what if we did this. For example, at that time we had 1,200 some students and they used to have 3,000. I said, "Why are so many of these classrooms empty? Why do you only have thirteen classrooms? Can't you go sit in those others?" They said, "We don't have teachers for those hours. I asked the question: if we put an ad in the paper offering a forty-hour course to train new teachers in our method would we be able to select teachers from that group? Do you think anybody would apply?" They thought about it and said, "Maybe they would." Anyway, that was the way I proceeded. It took a lot of time but we gradually got to where we needed to go.

Q: Was this a Binational Center in Jakarta itself or another city?

BROWN: This was in Jakarta. There were centers in other cities; there was one in Surabaya and one in Medan but this was the main one. The others were considered subordinate to this one.

Q: You are in the capital city. You are with the embassy. Did you also hold an embassy title or were you just---

BROWN: Yes, my title, instead of director of courses, was assistant executive director of the BNC and English teaching officer for the U.S. Embassy USIS.

Q: How big was the USIA office in the embassy in Jakarta? Who was the public affairs officer?

BROWN: The first one was Walter Brennan. I think that was his name. He left pretty soon. and---

Q: Oh Clyforth, Clyforth.

BROWN: Clyforth was a super officer. He had a minister title; he was very good to work with. We had some great times; he did some good stuff. At that time the climate in the government was supporting the Center with a \$40 thousand grant for its cultural

programs and its oversized staff. The board of directors wouldn't let anybody be fired; the government was threatening to cut that grant in order to close the center.

That's when they sent me there. The board was causing a big stink because the embassy local employees had gotten a raise but the BNC employees did not get their raise. The board of directors' chairman was threatening to cause a diplomatic stink either by a publicity stunt or by closing the Center himself.

Fortunately, soon after I had arrived _____ came as the director of the Center. We saw eye-to-eye and we worked together and worked with the board. We convinced them "you are not going to get a raise". We had to make changes in the operation and get it back to where it needed to be. Gradually we turned him around and the board approved a severe austerity program. There would be no overtime. We couldn't hire anybody; we wouldn't rehire anybody who dropped out. By attrition we lost twenty-five percent of our staff over a couple of years. That helped a lot.

We increased enrollment by five, giving the course and hiring new teachers until we were back up to this capacity of a small Center which was about 3,600 students. That took a couple of years I guess, more or less. Each one of these advances was never quite enough to make the Center independent financially but it gave us time. Then we decided we'd done everything we could do. We started classes earlier and later we upped the prices and were teaching classes in businesses and government ministries. We couldn't expand anymore but it still wasn't enough.

We decided to experiment with renting space to expand. Space was so expensive we doubted we could but it worked and we found that we could. About that time I became the director. Bob Taylor was transferred, and I became the director. We had some new blood on the board including a financial officer from CITIBank and one from one of those big oil companies, a local Indonesian. The board chairman assigned those two people to work with me to find a property where we could expand our operation. We found a big home and were able to get the \$93,000 lease, a loan from CITIBank, to refurbish it and get it ready. The embassy gave me ten thousand dollars to go to Singapore and buy furniture for it. We opened a branch center and in one enrollment we doubled the enrollment from 3,600 to 5,000 in one step.

Q: Literally it was like having to run a business?

BROWN: That's right.

Q: You were in a position of being very conscientious of incoming revenues. It's almost like running a business.

BROWN: Oh definitely. I think it was like a business and it was complicated. We had good people; I had a very good administrator of the Center and a good accountant. We thought that when we doubled the enrollment we were going to be saved. After a few weeks the accountant came to me and said, "We are going to be in the red by the end of

the year.” I said, “What?” I had been trying to get a report from the teaching section about the class levels and everything. They said they were so overworked with the extension that they hadn’t been able to give me the usual feedback on the results of the registration.

When I finally got the results I found out the assistant director of courses had stripped classes in order to get all the teachers we had trained classes and they had stripped classes so that there was not enough income from each class to pay for the teacher. I got sabotaged by this guy. When I found out what he had done we fired him without cause. If we had told him why he was fired we would have had to prove it in court and the legal advice we got was “you’ll never win.” We just fired him without cause, paid a huge fee, giving him like a year’s salary and didn’t tell him why. That was a struggle; that was very difficult. He had begged on his knees. Most employees wanted me to give him his job back but he knew what he had done. He knew it was wrong.

We just toughed it out and lo and behold we got a loan from the embassy to tide us over to the end of the year crisis. By the end of the year we were putting ten thousand dollars pure profit into the building fund. We paid back that loan to the embassy two years in advance. That change not only saved the Center but it changed the culture of the Center. They stopped thinking about it as a rice bowl operation; they didn’t have to make money.

The attitude in Indonesia following Sukarno’s was that the government and business owed everybody a job. Anyway, everybody took on a different attitude and started to feel committed to the Center on a different level. Like I said we were putting ten thousand dollars a month into the building fund before I left.

It wasn’t very long after I left that the BNC not only didn’t need USIS money anymore they told USIS to go fly a kite. So for saving the Center I got blamed for creating a monster. When I went back I think it was nineteen years later there were 74,000 students just in the Jakarta BNC. The embassy had made friends again with the Center so things were rosy again. they didn’t need U.S. money but the cooperation was very valuable to both the Center and to the government. The biggest thing in my career really was saving that Center. It turned out to be the most successful Center in the history of the BNC program.

Q: Excellent, you had come from Bogota which was a big program to Jakarta which you were describing as a big program. Was there a difference in the source and quality of the students that took advantage of the BNC?

BROWN: In our cases the people that came to study in BNC were paying for it and so they were not casual students like they were in the public schools. In our case I would say they were fairly well motivated people but for some reason in Jakarta they had a dedication to learn English that was just palpable. Everybody just felt like we just had to learn English and they would do anything to learn. That’s why we were so successful: we just made it available to them.

Q: Jakarta was quite committed to the whole idea?

BROWN: English language skills in Jakarta were---I had never seen the demand for English anywhere else like it was there. 74,000 students just in Jakarta and we had branches all over the county besides that. They were so strong; when I went back the government had authorized them to give the master's degree and teach English as a foreign language.

Q: That's excellent. Was the embassy equally as interested in your success? You were obviously working with the PAO and whatnot. Did Ambassador Galbraith or other embassy officers note your success?

BROWN: I didn't have much contact with Galbraith. He was replaced by David...

Q: Newsom.

BROWN: David Newsom. He was the best ambassador I ever worked for. He paid more attention to the BNC than any other ambassador did. That was just fabulous. He couldn't have been more supportive. He held a weekend retreat where he invited the heads of all of the sections of the embassy and me. I was director of the BNC then, and we were to try to discover what was happening with the image of America. At that time he said he was having a difficult time getting contact with the people he needed to have contact with in the government. Some of them were just not available. Some of them were. He was trying to get the general impression of all of us as to what our image was. After the three-day conference the consensus was that he should stay in contact with those he was still able to have good relations with and hope. He should contact our people who had grown up with the USIS activities. When we were showing films---we had film trucks showing films in the villages---we had the libraries support the language_____ teachers. We had the very stuff that the elitists currently in charge of USIA in Washington were trying to cut out in favor of more sophisticated propaganda.

Q: What were the kinds of things that Ambassador Newsom would do in support of the BNC?

BROWN: He paid attention to what we were doing and to our problems. He permitted me to develop a close relationship with him; he hosted my farewell, which was totally unusual. Being hosted by the ambassador was usually reserved only for embassy heads of departments. He even invited our son who was in high school to stay, saying "If he wanted to stay here and graduate he can stay with me; I've got two kids in the school. He can live with us and graduate here." He offered that. I'm sure that he was responsible for me becoming the director at the time when I should have gone to another assignment. I was promoted to be the director and stayed in Indonesia for over five years, which was unheard of in USIS. He saw things he wanted to keep happening and that's the way I judge it. He never said that he had lobbied for me to stay on but I'm sure that's what happened.

Q: That's an excellent compliment. While you were in Indonesia when you were first hired, you were Foreign Service staff or something.

BROWN: I was actually what we called a grand grantee which was really just a contract officer. I was promoted I think while I was still in Bogotá. I was given a specialist rank within the agency.

Q: Right.

BROWN: Then I became a staff officer and then later I became a full-fledged FSIO, Foreign Service Information Officer. The FS officers just added the "I" for "information". We were on the same page and everything at that time.

Q: Right. You became a full fledged officer in 1975 while you were in Jakarta. Do you think that was a USIA program that came to fruition had given you that rank or do you think Ambassador Newsom---

BROWN: I think it was USIA but I think they had to have embassy backing for it or it wouldn't have happened. What happened was I was invited to take a panel exam pretty much like a master's degree university oral exam. I went to this oral exam in Washington and then about a year later the wheels finally turned and I got the FSIO.

\Q: So this was in the works for some time?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: The first step being that oral exam?

BROWN: Yes, I think other supervisors and Ambassador Newsom recommended me for it and that's why it happened.

Q: Now you had other lives and other duties while you were in Jakarta. I believe you said you were president of the PTA.

BROWN: Oh, that was fun. It was a very tumultuous year in the school.

Q: Let's talk about that for a little while.

BROWN: Okay.

Q: For administering these overseas schools the State Department has an office that helps fund and hire the teachers and whatnot. Now they are generally called International Schools. Was this the American High School or was this the International High School in Jakarta?

BROWN: It was international and was supported by eight embassies. They had diplomatic status; they could import anything they wanted to. That gave the school a lot of prestige. It was run as an American school but there was a side program for British kids who needed some special course work and so forth. That was provided but the school as a whole ran as an American school. It had an American superintendent, a principal, and it was the best school system I've seen anywhere, including the United States. It was so well run.

The school, however, refused to do anything about transportation. The school is located in a remote site a little bit out of town. There was one highway that everybody had to use to get there plus it was only a two lane road. Can you imagine all the cars that accumulated? The traffic situation was indescribable. Several hundred cars were trying to get their kids to school at the same time. A lot of families had drivers but, in some cases, the parents had to do it. Then they had to try to get to work; it was just a terrible mess. Anyway, the school would not even talk about taking any responsibility for how the kids got to and from school. There were a few neighborhoods where the parents got together and hired mini buses for three different groups. So there were minibusses taking kids to school and that helped.

The mini-busses were enough of an opener for the PTA. We called it the PTSA because it was a Parent Teacher Student Association. We thought the busing thing could be made to work so my job when I took over the PTSA was to convince---well first of all we ran an eighty thousand dollar a year business having buses take the kids to school. We had to put a parent on every bus for delivery to the school and from the school. The busing company wouldn't take any responsibility for the behavior of the kids and that made sense. It was a big administrative problem to put people on those buses whose kids had been scheduled but it worked.

Close to the end of the year when the school board was ready to have their big meeting about the budget for the next year I had a meeting with the chairman of the board who happened to be the head of AID. He was a pretty powerful guy. I explained the problem to him in ways that he had never heard explained before. Then when they brought up bussing at the school board meeting with the idea of the school taking over the bussing the principal objected. That is the superintendent who met with the board, objected. The president of the board told him his objections were childish and they had a unanimous vote. The school had to take over the bussing. They did it and they did a wonderful job like they did with everything else. I almost had to draw blood to get the school to do what it had to do. Anyway, that was a terrific experience.

Another thing that year and every year was a school fair sponsored by the Parents' Association and it was bigger than anything I have ever seen anywhere else. All the businesses in town had booths and they'd give their profits to the school. They had a variety show that would show several times a day with talent from the kids that made a lot of money. It had all kinds of games and contests; they raffled off a Pedicab. Anyway, the year that I was president we cleared fifteen thousand dollars to support the school's extracurricular activities, just to give you an idea of the size of that activity. It was very

fulfilling to do that. We were able to get a lot of good stuff for the athletic groups and the clubs. We used a lot of that money to establish funds that they could draw on for their activities. Then they pledged revolving funds for the drama club, and for the athletic teams. They didn't have to raise money any more; they could have money to work with in advance and then they would replace it. That was very fulfilling.

Q: You said that was for the 1975-1976 term. Everybody serves only one year or---

BROWN: That was a one year thing. The next year the fair made seventeen thousand dollars. Anyway, it was just a one year thing. I felt that we owed the school something so I had my name put forward. Then I wished I hadn't. It was a difficult year but it was rewarding in its own year.

Q: 1976 was an interesting year for USIA because that's the American Bicentennial. Were there special programs that the BNC and the embassy did in Jakarta for that year?

BROWN: There was a great deal of attention drawn to the Bicentennial for everything that the embassy did and everything USIS did. We had post exhibits; we had everything you can think of. The climax at the end of the year, according to the ambassador, was the production of the musical comedy 1776. That was a portrayal of the Continental Congress creating the Declaration of Independence. That was a fabulous experience and as the BNC director I was the producer.

We had an incredible experience putting it together. All the tickets were sold before we even printed publicity. The play caused so much attention in the community all the tickets were sold out before the first performance, so we let people watch the dress rehearsal. We couldn't get the stage any longer to extend the time so it was limited. We couldn't find another venue. It was an incredible success. The ambassador in his Thanksgiving Day speech mentioned that the Bicentennial was the highlight, the climax, for the celebration the embassy had been conducting all year.

Q: Very fun. Who were some of the players?

BROWN: That's a good question. John Hancock was an embassy officer; the superintendent of the school was the Congressman. The manager of the Petroleum Club, which was a big dinner club owned by the National Petroleum Company, had a big part; he was not at the embassy.

Q: So it was really a community production?

BROWN: We had people from Holland, from Australia, Japan and Germany involved---more than I can think of off the top of my head. The orchestra was recruited and trained by the director of the German Institute during the rehearsal time so that our overall director could spend more time with the students. It was a bigger than life experience.

Q: That sounds pretty neat. The Carter administration then is elected in '77; you are still there in Jakarta. Were there any particular changes that you noticed with that new administration coming in?

BROWN: Not in Jakarta but in Brazil the impact was quite big. That is where I went next. Jakarta had made waves that affected our operation in Brazil big time. The new president came out pontificating about human rights and demanding that all the other countries adopt his standards. Brazil told him where to get off.

Q: Well then let's move to that. In '77 your tour in Jakarta is over. Who replaces you? Do you recall?

BROWN: I do not. He was only in for a short time and then they went independent. I don't remember who it was.

Q: Aha, well, let's see. In '77 you would have been talking to Washington about your next assignment. How did those discussions go? What was your next assignment after Jakarta?

BROWN: My assignment was to Mexico City but my wife had asthma and we couldn't get medical clearance for Mexico City. We went on what was called 'loose pack' where they placed our effects in storage somewhere waiting for a final assignment. That took several months as I recall, quite a few weeks of extra time. We had more home leave than usual and I finally was assigned as a benched public affairs officer in Porto Alegre.

Q: Now did you have any Portuguese language before you left?

BROWN: I had a few weeks of Portuguese language and then I knew Spanish so I got pretty capable in Portuguese before I went.

Q: They are fairly close languages, aren't they?

BROWN: There is an eighty-five percent correlation of vocabularies but there are a lot of traps. There are deceptive cognates where a word in one language sounds like the word in another language but means something else entirely. False cognates have different meanings, despite sounding alike. Then the usage patterns were quite different. It's still challenging but it's a big help to know Spanish that's for sure. Then an interesting thing happened and I mentioned this in my notes to you. When we stopped off in Brasilia on our way to Porto Alegre we had dinner at the home of Bob Cogman who was the PAO. Later that night he passed away.

Q: Oh! goodness.

BROWN: We spent the whole time we were in Porto Alegre with the acting PAO Bob Cross. He had been the deputy PAO. We had a really good time in Porto Alegre except for Cogman's death and my wife's asthma. It was very humid there and she couldn't

breathe well. Bob Cross liked our work so he was able to get us transferred to Brasilia instead of some other country. We thought that was a blessing. Brasilia has one of the driest climates in the world. Sometimes on some days it's drier than the Sahara.

Q: I would not have anticipated that.

BROWN: I didn't know either but that was a big boon for us because my wife got along very, very well. We stayed for an additional four years.

Q: Now this new assignment is August 1977. How does one go to post if one is assigned to Brazil?

BROWN: I'm not sure what you mean.

Q: I have the impression that only one American airline goes down there.

BROWN: I think at the time there was only one American airline going into Brasilia and that is how we went. We went by air everywhere we were sent.

Q: Your assignment is Porto Alegre but you probably didn't fly straight to it. You would have flown to Brasilia first?

BROWN: We flew to Brasilia for consultation and Bob Cogman invited our family to dinner that night. Then we went on the next day to Porto Alegre and learned later that he had passed away after he had eaten dinner. No one was prepared for the fact that he passed away like that. Anyway where were we?

Q: I'm wondering. We've put a lot into this. Do we want to break this off now so we have plenty of time for Brazil the next time around?

BROWN: Whatever you want. I'm free to keep going either way.

Q: Hang on. Let me look at my notes here. Okay, let's actually keep going here. What I wanted to double check was a sense from you of how the American diplomatic mission in Brazil was organized. The embassy is in Brasilia; the ambassador is John Crimmins?

BROWN: I can't remember who the first ambassador was or the second for that matter. Their names are escaping me right now.

Q: We can put it in later but it's a big country so there are lots of consulates, Rio, São Paulo, Belen, Porto Alegre, Recife, and Salvador at that time. Let's go to Porto Alegre. Who is the consul general there; how big a mission was that?

BROWN: I would say it was medium size as far as consulates go. The consul general reported to the ambassador, of course, and I reported to USIS. We worked together and got along fine. I can't think of his name right now.

Q: I have Alfred Barr?

BROWN: He left before I got there I think.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: I remember the name but I didn't ever meet him.

Q: There was you and then Thomas Caswell. Was he in commercial?

BROWN: That's when I was in Sao Paulo. I only met him when I made a trip to Sao Paulo for personal reasons.

Q: Okay. What was the primary mission of Porto Alegre; why have the consulate there?

BROWN: My mission was the same as always---public diplomacy to try to enhance the image and understanding of America among the local people. My job was to develop relationships with the local cultural and civic leaders. I saw a lot of movies, I joined the Opera Society but I was transferred before we had any operatic activity. I was a singer by the way and did a number of musical things along the way. We were only there for three months because of my wife's asthma. We had a lot of relations with the universities, like we had in other embassy positions. It's the same---it's just a branch.

Q: Were there universities in town that you worked with?

BROWN: Yes, there was one major university in Porto Alegre and it had an official government university in Porto Alegre and had one in Recife and then there was the big university.

Q: And would you be the liaison officer for the local newspapers and journalists?

BROWN: They sent a telex to us every day and we would try to place the information in local newspapers about U.S. events that we thought would be interesting to the local people or help them understand American policy.

Q: How do you think the local media handled U.S. issues?

BROWN: That was mixed: we had good relations with our contacts in the media and they made it clear that Brazil was not going to be a lackey to the United States in any way. They would not have that kind of followers. They were respectful and professional; they weren't above criticizing if they didn't agree. They certainly didn't agree with Jimmy Carter's statements about their human rights record. That was the big issue that we had to deal with.

Q: Now you were in Porto Alegre for three months you said?

BROWN: For a few months.

Q: So, let's see if you arrived in mid-August you would have transferred to Brasilia by the start of 1978.

BROWN: In mid-August we went to Brasilia.

Q: Now in March of '78 President Carter visited Brasilia

BROWN: He made a trip down there to try to mend fences after he had caused such a stir when he first took office. That was my second experience with a presidential visit. Gerald Ford had made a visit to Jakarta but I was only peripherally involved in handling the press people. We tried to staff Brazil so I was sent back up to Rio from Porto Alegre to help with the nonsense that comes with a presidential visit.

Q: They are complicated aren't they?

BROWN: They are insane.

Q: What was the nature of the initial criticism and the reaction?

BROWN: The initial reaction was to tell President Carter to keep his nose out of our private affairs.

Q: I mean did he make a specific criticism of Brazil or was it just Latin America in general?

BROWN: I think it was probably both. His attitude was he was doing it in general but Brazil reacted very much to it because they were doing the things that he was criticizing. He probably made a point of Brazil for them to have reacted as strongly as they did. I'm guessing on that.

Q: By the March '78 visit you are in Brasilia and the embassy is preparing for this massive visit. How did the embassy assign various and sundry duties?

BROWN: What I remember clearly is that I was assigned to work in the press room where they had all the typewriters and telex machines and telephone banks and everything. I don't remember very much about what I actually did there; it was a long time ago.

Q: Was that press mainly for U.S. media or local Brazilian media?

BROWN: That was for the U.S. media mostly. It was for them to get their messages back to their papers and their organizations back in the U.S. They had all kinds of telex and telephone banks set up.

Q: Did you get a chance to chat up anybody whose articles you'd previously read? Or let me turn that around. How did the U.S. media strike you in their professionalism?

BROWN: They were just dead set on hearing as much information as fast as they could and getting it back to the States. I didn't have any contacts with anyone that were negative. In Bogota I had some kind of activity with the media on the moon rock visit. I had to stop some people from going through the door and I had to physically block it because they were trying to push me away. In Jakarta I had contact with some top press people in the country at the time; Harry Reasoner, Barbara Walters and another one. I handled their luggage personally but I don't remember much about the Jakarta visit as far as my activities were concerned.

Q: The ambassador at the time of the visit would have been who?

BROWN: Let me see; apparently it was Crimmins. I didn't know.

Q: The embassy in Brasilia is pretty large.

BROWN: Yes. Besides the PAO, and the DPAO, there was a program development office which had a director, a deputy and two program officers. We worked with the seven branch PAOs of the programming staff. Sheldon Krebs was the program development officer, and I was the deputy. After a while I was in charge of the other program officers.

Q: You were liaison between Washington and the PAOs as to what USIA's programming was going to be?'

BROWN: Yes, we operated according to what we called the country plan. Every year we would submit a country plan which asked for the finance and support needed for the number of exchanges we wanted to make, the number of programs we wanted to have and that kind of detail. Then everything we did was supposed to be justified by being part of that plan.

Q: Were there unique aspects to Brazil that got into the country plan, such as the universities?

BROWN: It was a very active time because Brazil was in a very active culture, much more so than the other Latin cultures that I had worked with. People were less traditional, more mobile, socially, economically and geographically. They were more mobile than the other Latin countries I had worked with. They were fun to work with because they were very active and proactive; they wanted to see things done; they wanted to be creative. It was a good place and I enjoyed my five years in Brazil.

Q: Let me back up for a minute because you were in Porto Alegre and you realized that this wasn't a good place for your wife. How lucky were you that you got to be assigned to Brasilia; how did that opening come up?

BROWN: It was unusual to get in-country transfers. We felt like it was a blessing on a couple of counts although we realized it was definitely a professional set-back. The Branch PAO (BPAO) position was much more prestigious than a PAO at a big embassy. Because of the climate and my wife and because of the people I worked with in Brazil it was so positive and supportive in almost all cases it was a very favorable thing. Who knows where we would have landed otherwise? It would have been an off schedule change and we would probably have been stuck in Washington walking the halls for weeks trying to find something. That would be my guess. I got three promotions while I was in Brazil; you can't discount that.

Q: That's an interesting observation too because that speaks to all the programs that were going on and how busy it was.

BROWN: I felt very blessed by Brazil.

Q: Now while you were there Bob Cross was the acting PAO but a new PAO came in: McKinney Russell.

BROWN: We've got to talk about McKinney.

Q: What was McKinney like to work for?

BROWN: McKinney was the smartest officer I ever encountered. He was in the Foreign Service and he was an absolute genius in a number of ways. He had mastered Portuguese in three weeks at FSI; he memorized the names of all the American and the local staff. He knew about their wives and knew about their history.

He had asked on a transfer when he was in Washington. He'd asked for pictures of all the local employees and the American employees so he could call them by name when he got off the airplane and he did it. He met everybody by calling them by their first name when he shook their hand. It was not very many days until they stopped questioning whether he had really mastered Portuguese or not; it was evident that he had.

We would be in a staff meeting and he would quote cables and he would give their numbers without having the cable or any notes in front of him. He'd say, "Now cable such and such with five or six numbers on it " and he would talk about it. If somebody asked---in advance---if we were going to have a speaker six weeks on the same day he would think for a second or two and say that's going to be on a Wednesday. He had some kind of a calendar in his head that he could refer to. He kept info about a week for any date that you could give him. Others thought he was a hard person to work for but I didn't find him to be that. He was very supportive; he knew everybody in detail within a few weeks. He knew what we were doing and at what stage we were working but he didn't micromanage. He let us do our work.

We knew he expected a lot so the incentives were high to produce. He returned the respect that I gave to him. I always felt I wasn't as fast as he was. Sometimes he expected too much because he wasn't always conscious of the fact that we weren't as smart as he was nor as efficient.

I have to tell you one incident that was interesting. The press officer had set up a press conference on some subject. McKinney met with the press and after the meeting I got a note from McKinney saying, "Be sure that these get entered into our computer system to show that they were here for education." I passed that note to the press officer after I had entered their name and I said with a note that the good shepherd is looking over our shoulder. The press officer noticed how much attention McKinney was paying to the details of our work. The next morning I was shocked to find that same note back on my desk with words from him that McKinney had written, "pax vobiscum", in other words "Peace be unto you." He had A, and B was his press officer and he had betrayed me by showing that to McKinney. McKinney's reaction was he let me know he had seen it and that he wasn't offended by it. He understood what was going on. I liked working for McKinney Russell.

Q: Did he make any particular program changes?

BROWN: Everything got more intense; everybody was trying harder to make our account for his planned objectives. It was very much four percent. While we were doing what we were doing everybody was intensely trying to get it done.

Q: Were you in a position to see McKinney interact with the ambassador?

BROWN: Not that I recall and that's a blank for me. I just assumed that they respected each other for who they were.

Q: Shortly after you arrived Crimmins left and Sayre went on as ambassador?

BROWN: What's the name?

Q: Let me look. Here is Robert Sayre, S-A-Y-R-E; he's the ambassador from 78-'81.

BROWN: That sounds right. The only contact I had with him, the only personal communication between us, was when I was president again at the school board. There they had the Parent Teacher Association in Brasilia again and again. It was a very tough year.

It's kind of a long story but I'll try to make it succinct. The school master had been in the school for a long time and he thought he had everybody in his pocket. The board pretty much rubber stamped anything he wanted and so forth until the hostage crisis in Iran. That had displaced the teachers from that school there---the American School. Six of those teachers ended up in Brasilia. They saw that some aspects of the way the school in Brasilia was run were not up to the standards they were used to. They tried to make some

suggestions to the headmaster but he didn't want to listen to them. Then they put together a written statement and they all signed it. I think it contained some positive suggestions on how to improve the school. This girl basically hadn't asked him so he saw their activity as a sign of lack of loyalty and support. He tried to fire all six of them point blank. The board wouldn't do it; the board finally stood up to him and said that we have to have an investigation. It led to a terrible conflict between the Brazilian parents who supported the school headmaster, and the American community which opposed what he was doing. I was in the middle.

They actually hired a professional arbitrator to come in and study the situation. I called a meeting of both American and Brazilian parents to talk about it. We tried to calm down the negative and confusing. We tried to get things straight and help people understand. I knew it was going to be a difficult meeting because the Brazilians were mad and the Americans were mad at the headmaster. I studied probably ____ for two days to be sure that I could conduct the meeting. As the meeting progressed there was one school board member who had made some comments earlier that were not constructive. He tried to get the floor again and I refused it. He actually came up and tried to wrestle the mike out of my hands but he didn't succeed. Anyway, we finally got through that nightmare and the arbitrator knew that the headmaster had to be fired. We won that battle but we ended up with a bunch of scars. The school suffered greatly but it survived. I never allowed my name to be put on any ballot after that.

Q: And what again?

BROWN: I never allowed my name to be put on any ballot after those two experiences with the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association).

Q: Once burned. When you first went to Brasilia you were one of four program development officers. By 1980 you are the deputy director of the bureau and in charge of the other officers.

BROWN: That's me. That was a senseless administrative nerve that I really fought. It didn't make any sense for me to be in charge of those other guys. I had worked with them for a long time as lateral associates. I didn't want leadership over them. I fought it but I lost that battle and I had to work with them on a different level. There were not many spirits compared to the relationship I had had with them before.

Q: Now would these have been McKinney's adjustments?

BROWN: I guess so. He was the PAO and the DPAO was a good friend. It was nice working for him. He gave me---for fighting this---what he called an advancement. I didn't consider that advancement was guaranteed. There was an _____ officer that I really admired. I liked working with and playing tennis with him. They did that so I could understand and partly to facilitate my being in charge of the program division while several of the idiots went on extended leave. I became totally responsible for the computerized records system that we kept on all of our contacts before I contributed to it

but I wasn't in charge of it. They just thought at the same time, "we'll just put him over there with the program officers" and that's the part that didn't make any sense.

Q: Let me ask you between the time when you came to Brazil and your leaving in 1982 some five years later what changes did you see in Brazil? Or what was the difference between when you arrived and when you departed?

BROWN: One big difference was that they had a military government when I got there and the military actually abdicated and turned the government back over to the incoming government. The parliament was active and we had a lot of programs with them. That was it, that and there was an economic shift. There was an exchange crisis. I remember that I was taking advantage of this huge change in the currency in exchanging money between Brazilian and U.S. money. I gained enough to pay for a car. The Brazilian economy has always been pretty volatile; they have a lot of ups and downs.

Q: Now 1982 you are about to leave Brazil, were you fishing for an assignment in Washington?

;

BROWN: Yes, that was a time that I went to Washington without an assignment even though I had applied for numerous positions. Before we left Brazil I mentioned briefly that we had a very big 4th of July celebration there. I just wanted to mention that my wife was in charge of the entertainment for one of the last celebrations they had there. She got a special certificate from the ambassador for the excellent program that she had arranged, organized, presented. We had a lot of important Brazilians taking part in that whole day of celebration. He knew what to ask and he had shown that recognition to her.

Q: That's a great compliment. He acknowledged her significant good input and that is good for morale. Let me ask one question. It's easy enough to realize what the PAO does and what the cultural affairs officer does, but you are a program officer or the assignment was as a program officer. Are you getting out into the community as much as the PAO and CAO?

BROWN: Probably more because our main activity as program officers was bringing in speakers. We did other things but speakers were a big deal. We'd bring in speakers on economy, on agriculture, on environment and all kinds of things we considered important to both countries. We would go with these people to the universities or to the ministries to comment on their visit so we could record their programs that were in production. We got out a lot because of that.

Q: Excellent and that means there are the universities and the media and all those sorts of things.

BROWN: There was a press officer who had to direct media. That was where the institution often tied in with the speaker's program because they publicized it. Still it was mostly universities and ministries and a good lot with the congress, parliament.

Q: Now in 1981 a new administration comes in. Are you seeing any particular immediate changes with the new administration?

BROWN: You mean in the U.S. presidency?

Q: The Reagan administration came in in 1981 so are there some immediate changes to USIA or USIA programs in Brazil that come out of that transition?

BROWN: Not anything that I remember being a traumatic change.

Q: The new ambassador is Langhorne Motley.

BROWN: That's right. I was trying to remember his name. I played tennis with him. He was a very approachable person; we really liked him a lot. He was my first contact with most ambassadors.

Q: He was non-career but you were saying he was very approachable.

BROWN: He'd come out and play tennis with everyone. On Saturdays we'd play and there was nothing stuffy about him whatsoever.

Q: He is the one who praised your wife's July 4th efforts. Let's take a break here because you will leave Brasilia in August of '82 and we can get to that and work on your next assignment in our next session. How is that?

BROWN: Shall I wait to hear from you about the next one?

Q: I'm sorry?

Q: Yeah, we will exchange some emails.

BROWN: I've enjoyed this opportunity and look forward to the next round.

Q: Excellent; we'll catch up with you, Bob.

BROWN: Okay, bye.

Q: Good morning. Today is September 14 and we are returning to our conversation with Robert Brown. Robert, we ended up with you leaving Brasilia in August of 1981. You had an assignment in Washington. Did you get that before you left?

BROWN: I'm not sure. I don't think so. The assignment as co-coordinator of the move at USIA was quite a surprise. I got to Washington without an assignment. I had surgery on my back and it took me a little bit to get better but not very long before I was on my feet.

I was assigned at first to go for duty half days while I was still recovering. The bus service, I learned from MED, didn't have mid-day service so I had to work more like six hours a day until I got clearance for full time. That's just a detail---not very important. My assignment just coordinated the move.

At that time USIA was scattered in several buildings around the Northwest part of the city. They built a new building in Southeast. I think it was the Southeast sector that was to have the whole agency. Everything would be in one place. Of course, moving everything from the old buildings to the new building had been in preparation for years.

The move was quite an operation. The director pulled in a political appointee, a military colonel named Jerry Rabel; he was recruited as an assistant to the director for the specific purpose of directing the move. I was assigned to his office as a co-coordinator for that move. There was another person in that job and there were two others who were considered to be co-coordinators. The other person was handicapped, his wife was in hospice dying and he had five kids to look after.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

BROWN: Neither one of us was very well prepared for that kind of work and Jerry Rabel was hard to work for. He expected us to be his _____ and as able to push people around as he was. We weren't. We managed to hang in there and we learned as we went. He had some assistants who were very good at helping point out what needed to be done next and then helping get it done. We survived that climate but it never was a pleasure for me; I didn't feel qualified. That was one of the few times, you know, I didn't feel like I was in the right spot.

Q: Now these were the first years of the Reagan administration and the new head of USIA was--- I can't think of the name right now.

BROWN: I'm trying to remember now too but I don't have it written down here. Who was it?

Q: I want to say Remington. Anyway, was this consolidation move very much associated with the new administration or had this been in training for...

BROWN: I think this was something we had to have. It was just impractical for the agency to be out there in places all over town. I think it would have happened sooner or later in any administration. I don't know how much the change of administration had to do with the timing, but it probably had something to do with it.

Q: Anyway in due course you were the coordinator of this move. Did individual offices, I mean was everybody cooperative or were some offices saying, "No, wait a minute; we need more space than that, or those kinds of adjustment issues.

BROWN: No. My only question here is the space was quite carefully planned. I don't remember any such complaints as that. I think they were happy to get into their new office space and cooperate. Most of them were more anxious to move because as soon as they were prepared we would move them. It was a very gradual move and I think I was in there for about a year before it was finished. The main thing that I haven't said about that experience was that it was discovered early in that assignment that I had a reasonably good ability for writing. So I got a variety of assignments. There were times when Jerry Rebel had to report to the director and he would have me do a summary of the status of the move.

Then I was surprised later when I was in the training division. At one point they asked Jerry Rabel to come and be a kick-off speaker for the training of a new group of junior officers and he asked me to write his speech for him.

Q: You started with the training division in mid-'83?

BROWN: Yes, I was sent there. I was there---I don't remember how long---but in 1984 I got a chance to move to the training division and I grabbed it.

Q: What kind of duties did the training division have?

BROWN: Mostly it was training with new junior officer groups that were being recruited, their initial training. The State Department did some of the training at the Foreign Service Institute, FSI, but we did quite a bit on the USIA agency side before and after they went to the JOTs. (Junior Officer Training).

Q: This is the third...

BROWN: What we did was we brought in people from inside and outside of the government. In that way high officials in the government agencies were brought in to lecture to the young people about the government that they were going to have to represent. They were pretty cooperative because they lacked visibility and they also wanted their Foreign Service people to know what was going on in Washington.

Q: What you are talking about is the brand new officer training State Department. It calls itself the A100 course. Did USIA have that kind of nomenclature?

BROWN: Not that I recall. We just called them JOTs, junior officer trainees.

Q: Now in the recruitment phase USIA officers take the same Foreign Service officer test and they go through the same sort of oral test. At one point they actually join Foreign Service officers in the A100 course but what you are talking about is USIA training for the new people to expose them to what the government is about.

BROWN: In general terms I would mention, of course, public diplomacy. What we were doing was giving them that orientation to the Foreign Service. The State Department and

the Foreign Service courses were more about political and economic reporting that the State Department was responsible for. We were trying to give them the vision of _____ well public diplomacy and how our job was to tell America's story to the world so everybody understood our policies and circumstances.

Q: Now how long would this initial training last?

BROWN: It may have been only a week or two weeks; I don't remember exactly. It's been a long time.

Q: Right. A new officer once he goes through this introductory course, what kind of assignment would he normally get? I'm thinking Foreign Service officers would be sent off to issue visas; what would a new USIA officer likely to be assigned to?

BROWN: New USIA officers were assigned to an overseas post and they would do a rotation. They would serve so many weeks in each section of the USIA and USIS operations so they would have a general orientation to everybody's work. Then they would be attached to a certain cone either the _____ or very general work.

Q: Do you recall how many incoming classes there were during this period?

BROWN: There must have been four or five at least.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: We didn't have one for a long, long time but then we had one after another of these courses.

Q: Do you recall what kind of background these new USIA officers in the early 1980s have? Were they all coming out---?

BROWN: Most of them had an academic background in international studies or in international relations or it could be journalism; some of them had master's degrees. When recruiting got to be more, I guess more demanding, that was the time when the government started to decide it was getting. I remember a few people came in with master's degrees and they weren't just young kids. They were middle-aged more or less with experience.

Q: The training course itself---assume you're the course director---you probably have a deputy?

BROWN: Yes, I had an excellent assistant, a young woman from Puerto Rico. We worked together very well. She was very knowledgeable about who the good speakers were and who was malleable and how to handle the different egos that came around with the high ranking officers who came through. She was the brains really and that helped the program work and helped me do better than I would have without her.

Q: Now you became the assistant director of the training division while you were in Washington searching for a job. Did they come to you or did you come to them? How did you realize that opening was there?

BROWN: They just came to me when the deputy was transferred/resigned; I don't remember where he went or what he did. They just put me in his place because I was on board and knew the operation.

Q: You were in the training division then for about a year?

BROWN: I suppose it must have been about that.

Q: I'm wondering because...

BROWN: I think it was 1984 when I left so I think it was '83 when I came in.

Q: Okay. In '84 you moved over to the press division?

BROWN: Right.

Q: How did you get that job?

BROWN: There was an opening and I applied for it because even though the training experience was okay I never felt like it was the strongest area. Between directors I was acting director in the training division for a while and I wasn't too sharp because they wouldn't let me do anything. I mean it was just a stop gap thing. I was actually assigned as acting director of the training division at one point.

I was attracted to the press job because I knew I had a colleague whom I had worked with before. He was in the division and I knew what the work was. I knew that it would suit me better, especially considering my personal life at that time. I had two of my kids in college and one was serving as a missionary for the church. To make it financially I had taken a paper route and between the paper route and the commute it was overtaxing me physically. The press job was much less demanding in terms of my attention, time and f. It fit better with my personal situation at that time and I liked the job.

The job was to extract items from all of the wire services, _____, UPI, and all of those. Some of them the audience again was of interest to U.S. embassies. I would put those in what was called a Wireless File, which was sent to every embassy in the world by telex every day about noon. In the afternoons I wasn't always fully employed. That was the thing that helped me survive that period when I was moonlighting with the paper route. I had assignments from time to time to cover press conferences at the White House and the Pentagon and State Department. I had special routing assignments. I did a summary history of the electoral system and the U.S. wanted the press files at election time, and things like that. Then in the afternoons I had to invent what to do on certain days.

Q: I want to focus on the Wireless File for the moment because when you are at the embassy one of the important ways to keep connected with the U.S. was the Wireless File. This was pre-email, if you will. Would you describe the Wireless File; what's in it, how is it prepared because it was an important document for the embassies overseas?

BROWN: I agree that's accurate. We recorded, of course, anything that came in and we also checked the New York Times and the Washington Post every day or anything about the government that we felt the embassies should know, along with the Wireless File. We also followed developments in other countries. For example, I remember doing quite a bit of reporting on the apartheid situation in South Africa, which was very biracial at that time. A lot of the posts were interested in getting that. I remember now the Wireless File that I put together was for Latin America. It didn't go to every embassy necessarily unless another area also reported it in his Wireless File. I was wrong in saying that mine went to every embassy; of course, the Wireless File did but mine was throughout Latin America. It was my specialty.

Q: And the Wireless File basically contained articles from the major American press, AP, UPL, NBC, what not---

BROWN: It was more international. Ours was mostly domestic stuff, things Congress was doing, _____ negotiations, which was a big issue in those days.

Q: Were all these articles telling the embassy wherever you were what was going on politically in the U.S. so that you would be attuned to not only what was going on in your country but what was going on in your backyard.

BROWN: Right, and we also carried the latest data from the stock markets. Once in a while it carried some other things like sports and things we thought the embassy would be interested in. Mostly it was things that we wanted to make available to the embassies to entrust people to clash with the newspapers. Otherwise it was according to the subject and the people who might be interested or affected by that kind of information.

Q: So this was material that the PAOs at post could also spread around with their local contacts.

BROWN: That was really probably the number one purpose. The number two about this was informing people about things they needed to know. It was very much oriented toward getting things posted in the foreign press. At times you look for that and, for example, if there was an educational matter it might not only go into the press but also to the public affairs officer. One of his assistants might actually take it to the university and have a seminar or something related to it.

Q: Now back in the office, what office was it actually that put out the Wireless File?

BROWN: I think it was called the Press Division. That was one of the only operations that I was really familiar with.

Q: Okay and who was head of that division?

BROWN: At one time it was a woman and before that---oh dear I don't have those names---

Q: At some point when you are editing the transcript what I'm asking is: with so many people it's easy to know State Department organizations. The Israeli desk is in the NEA bureau (Near East Asia) and NEA reports to such and such and so and so and so. What I am trying to do is let the researcher understand who is the boss, who is the next level up and how it all works. But you can fill that in later.

BROWN: My work was checked by a mid-level person who had professional press experience. His main purpose was to be sure that my writing fit the format that they wanted used. He was a former employee of UPI or one of those services. After a week or so I was pretty much on to his editing and so my work was hardly ever edited but he did go through it. Then there was another person and above him was the head of the Press Division and the deputy but I'm sorry I don't remember their names.

Q: Okay. Now were you in that job until the summer session of 1986 so actually you were in Washington a little over four years '82-'86?

BROWN: That seems to be right, yes. In June of '86 I went to Monterrey.

Q: Right and we will get to that in a minute. The last question I want to ask about the Wireless File is that by '86 the Iran Contra scandal had broken. Was there any censorship of the Wireless File or shading?

BROWN: No.

Q: What would we be telling the post about things like Iran Contra?

BROWN: I never felt I was being censored or needing contact with the public so there wasn't too much point in it, I don't think. You know those wire services were in the public domain. The main concern I had was that my reports were accurate as the writer reflected. There was one piece of news and it got written. Writing was very important in our office. I mean we wanted to be professional in everything we sent out.

Q: In the summer transfer season of '86, as you said, you went to the consulate general in Monterrey, Mexico. How did that opportunity come up?

BROWN: As my time for transfer approached and passed actually (I think it was more like it was quite early in the process) I remember writing to my wife that I had been offered the job in Monterrey but I might have to work a year because the person in the

job had asked for an extension. As it worked out he got the extension so I did have to wait a year for a better assignment but it came quite early in the press assignment period.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: They offered it to me. I had gotten my career counselor made available to me and I turned it down as soon as I could because I had a lot of interest in Mexico. My parents were born in Mexico. I had some experience in Mexico and I knew Spanish. It was close to the border and my wife had special medical needs. Her health was one of the reasons they gave us: that the assignment was because of my wife's asthma. It was a good climate and also close to the border so we could get medicines and things that we needed without a lot of trouble.

Q: Now, as you say, Mexico is an important neighbor to the U.S. This is only one of a fairly large number of consulates, the embassy being in Mexico City. What was the primary purpose, would you say, of putting a consulate in Monterrey?

BROWN: Monterrey is next to Mexico City and is the industrial area. It is the most industrialized and most evolved area of Mexico. There is a great interaction between the businesses and the southern U.S., Texas and so forth and Monterrey. The John Deere Company had plants in Monterrey; they sent seventeen semi-truck loads of parts to the area every month I think it was. There were a lot of American companies in that area. My opinion was that the economy got scared to know that Mexico was more tied to the U.S. than it was to Mexico City.

The consulate was a very, very visible, and important part of the landscape. I never felt so exposed. If I went to an art exhibit it would be in the papers---just the fact that I was there. The American Consulate was essentially a commercial player and very, very much in that area. The consul general had a meeting twice a week with all the company heads of the big industries including Monterrey just to be sure that the consulate knew everything that was going on. My picture was in the paper all the time and you start putting things in scrapbooks and it was just an everyday thing. I was the official spokesman for the consulate so people came to me constantly for clarifications; the interaction about immigration was controversial at that time. The consul general gave me a write up opportunity to represent the consulate. I was even put in his place when he left because he was so hard on the U.S. and what we were doing. Even though I wasn't a State Department officer every time he was away from post I was put in charge.

Q: In the organization in Mexico City you are the branch public affairs officer; in Monterrey whom do you report to in the embassy?

BROWN: I reported to the PAO and there was also a deputy PAO who paid a lot of attention to our work. He's the one who actually wrote my efficiency report; that's the deputy PAO. One of the PAOs while I was there was Sally Grooms who went on to be an assistant to an area director in the State Department. The other boss that I had was Robert

Earle and he was one of the people who advanced very rapidly to a very high position in the agency. He was very talented and good to work for.

Q: Would the branch public affairs officers from time to time get together and go up to Mexico City?

BROWN: Once in a while. I remember one meeting especially where we did that and we had top brass in the agency come down to the conferences we attended.

Q: How would you describe the job of a branch PAO? What were you supposed to do?

BROWN: A consulate general is like a mini embassy so the branch PAO would do what the PAO would do in the embassy. I had to look after the frustration and the co- _____. I had an assistant who was a crisis specialist and another one who was cultural assistant. I was just the general supervisor of all the public policy elements where we had an interest. I was the spokesman for the consulate for the U.S. government in that northeastern region of Mexico which is about one-quarter of the country.

Q: Was there another USIA officer there or in Monterrey? Were you the only officer?

BROWN: I was the only American officer there.

Q: So you had a number of Foreign Service nationals working for you?

BROWN: Actually, I had a staff of about five locals who were excellent. I always felt that the local staff should have gotten more credit than they did for the success of the American officers because they were the ones who knew all the contacts and they had to adjust to the idiosyncrasies of the officers. They were the ones who had been there for a number of years and they really helped us with our jobs because they knew the local contacts, the local atmosphere and most of them were very dedicated and very capable.

Q: I presume you were making Fulbright Scholarship nominations and international visitor nominations and those sorts of programs?

BROWN: Yes, very much so. We did that and we did all the program exchanges of professors, and exchanges of students. Actually we had more students going from Mexico to the U.S. than were coming to Mexico but in any case they came through us. We gave the testing for anyone who needed to study in the States whether it was an American or whatever subject. We gave the medical exam; we gave the TOPAL exam and so forth.

We had a lot of speakers. We would bring speakers into Mexico to talk about subjects of mutual interest and concern, like environmental issues, the economy, or the use of water since water was scarce. We would include any subject with a seminar or give lectures on that topic. We would also send people from those folks to the U.S. to consult with counterparts in the U.S.

Q: But now the U.S. and Mexico are neighbors. What's the value added to having an official USIA program in Mexico? I mean can't they read the U.S. papers?

BROWN: Not really. I mean there are a lot of bilingual people there and, of course, very sophisticated people. The general public didn't know that much. They knew about McDonalds and about things that don't really matter.

One of the very big things at our consulate always was tourist visas. We had lines of people more than a block long every day applying for visas to visit the United States. Our consul general would actually go out and serve them hot chocolate while they were standing there in the cold in the winter. They were standing there waiting to get in and apply for a visa that they weren't going to get anyway.

There was a very large consular corps there that handled all kinds of consular things, like anytime there was an American tourist in trouble or who died in Mexico, who got sick, or got arrested. Our consulate was involved. We had people in jail in Mexico and the consulate people tried to help and keep track of them.

Q: Were there any major educational institutions that you worked with?

BROWN: Oh, indeed there were two which were the National University in Monterrey and there was Monterrey Tech; they were both big and important. Monterrey Tech was a school like I'd never seen because in a sense they were so on top of everything. They were so progressive and effective and a very important part of the community. As I mentioned in my notes at every corner you went up to them. It's what their relationship with the U.S. had been; it could be development. I was once asked permission to reprint it for the National Science Foundation.

Q: One of the things that you worked on with Monterrey Tech was the first world net satellite dish. What was that program?

BROWN: This is a USIA lecture, so I'll start at the beginning. There was a program working and they got USIA started with that. It would be rockets and satellites through which interactive communication could take place between Mexican audiences and the U.S. speaker. They were scientists you wanted contact with. The others could tell the real American story because we could _____ high university. If they saw it on the Internet they could talk to me. We would get the press and other people together in Mexico to interact with them. We would have them actually ask questions and get answers through that satellite. As a matter of fact, when I went and visited the rector and told him we were going to get that satellite he got excited. He said, "I can think of all kinds of things that weekend the bandicoots and that and they did."

Some of the very early programs that we had at the university before I left the university had established the Reynolds system. They had a dish on each of the 24 campuses and they would have a master professor teach a course from one school to all the other schools on an interactive basis. It's amazing how they adapted to that technology and

made use of it. They were just that way about everything. They had it before any of the others knew anything about it.

When the economy was strong in Mexico well-off parents paid tuition years in advance so that they wouldn't be affected by inflation. They would pay tuition for their young children so no matter how much damage inflation had inflicted their kids were OK by that time. Things like that were never thought about elsewhere.

Q: One of the things that is included in the USIA program from time to time is music, including bringing American marching bands to post. Did you have the opportunity to schedule some U.S. bands?

BROWN: I had two major bands: the U.S. Army Field Band and the Iowa State college band. They were such outstanding programs; the response to them was so incredible. I had the Iowa State people come twice while I was there. As I mentioned what they saw on their first visit were clinics with the small schools and with the larger academy of music.

They discovered that there was a great shortage of musical instruments in these programs. The director told me and we talked about it. He said, "I think I can do something." When he got back to Iowa State his band members organized a campaign to collect musical instruments, used ones. Many parents had kids who had played a trumpet in grade school and then they stopped. The trumpet however was still sitting around. They organized several campus groups and they went to music stores and asked them to donate the used instruments that had been on rental for some time and were very rarely played. Anyway, they sent me a lot of instruments by pouch and then when they came the second time they brought one hundred more. I think it was 150 used or reconditioned musical instruments that we were able to provide to the local schools because of that Iowa State band contact. I can say it was one of the highlights of my career to have that happen.

Q: Now were these marching bands or both?

BROWN: This was a concert band as well as the military band. The military band did several concerts and they not only did their music venue with instrumentals but they did sketches from Broadway musicals. They acted out at the same time the band was playing the music and that was very popular. The Army Field Band was just a concert band but it was very, very effective.

Q: Now how big an area is the Monterrey consulate?

BROWN: It covers about one-fourth or more of the country. It went to the Pacific _____ on the West and, of course, to the East coast. Then there was no other consulate between us and Mexico City on the East Coast. We had a huge hunk of the country to cover and most of our work was in Alkia and Torreon and Monterrey and maybe a bigger area.

Q: Now while you were there in April 1988 Mexico City suffered a fairly severe earthquake. Did that affect Monterrey too?

BROWN: No, not really. I was actually in Mexico City when it had an earthquake; there was a second one. The really big one that destroyed a lot of the city and killed a thousand people had happened some weeks before. The one when I was there was at that point a size five. The damage had already been done so it didn't do that much more damage. It was very, very noticeable. The buildings were swaying at a thirty degree angle and it was hard to stay on your feet if you were on the ground. It was quite an experience to go through that even with the weaker second earthquake.

Q: When you first went to Monterrey how did you brief yourself up on what the program was, and what your responsibilities were?

BROWN: We had a staff meeting every week with all of the officers in the consulate and it didn't take long to share everybody's concerns. Everybody was interested in our aspects and work. The consul general later became an ambassador and his name was John Bennet. He was an exceptional leader and he was keen on the country team kind of approach. That's why he gave so much support to USIS and gave me so much visibility.

Q: When you first got there Martin Heflin was the consul general.

BROWN: He was CG for a very short time; he left right away.

Q: Oh.

BROWN: Bennett is the one that I really worked for most of the time I was there.

Q: How did he run the post?

BROWN: He ran the post like in many embassies. He had country team meetings; we were all expected to pay attention to each other and to their activities and support each other. For example, when the State Department was sending junior officers down for training he would make sure that they got a good experience in the USIS offices as well as the State Department offices during the rotation.

Q: In that part of the country did you get a chance to travel around to other cities or colleges or were you pretty much confined to Monterrey City itself?

BROWN: I made several trips to _____ and Torreon. There is another city further south that had several BNCs (binational centers) in my area. They all had concerns that I was able to help with because of my extensive experience with the BNCs before Monterrey. I did travel for that reason mostly.

Q: How many Binational Centers were in the district?

BROWN: There were _____, Torreon. I can't remember the name of the town that was south where they had one. They had a board director who was blind and who was very difficult for the staff to work with. I helped them smooth out some of the relationships; I'd have to look at a map to remember what town that was. There were two BNCs right in Monterrey and then _____ and Torreon were there which I dealt with.

Q: How long had those Binational Centers been in operation?

BROWN: I don't know exactly. When I came into the agency there were a lot of them---well established---all throughout Latin America. There were a few in Asia and very few in Europe because English teaching was not so much in demand in Europe. There was one in Spain. There was a huge one in Saigon that had grown spontaneously with forward looking citizens. Expatriate Americans had gotten together and formed an association and set up these centers, a few of them, to teach English but mostly to share cultural things. They had bilingual libraries and the government saw this operation and started pumping help to it in the form of building up their libraries and then sending directors and courses and so forth to help them. That is when they spread all over Latin America and around the world. I can't give you a date as to when they started; I'm sorry.

Q: What was student activism like at the time you were there? Any demonstrations?

BROWN: Nothing dramatic. There were a few student demonstrations but they were not enough to make international news or anything. Things were pretty calm.

Q: Let me ask a comparative question. In 1990 as you were about to leave Mexico, what had changed from the time that you had arrived four years earlier or what did you see as a positive trend?

BROWN: There was less concern about immigration, less concern that the United States was going to export all the illegals; that had been a very hot issue. Mexico did not want that to happen, especially in the Monterrey area. Everyone would have been very much distracted if it had happened. The motions between Monterrey Tech and U.S. universities continued to draw; they had scores of joint programs with American universities, all kinds of joint ventures and cooperating agreements. Businesses were flourishing. There was no dramatic change in general; things did well in the border area of Mexico that Monterrey was part of. It was continually more and more positive, more cooperation, less jealousy in crafts.

Crafts in Mexico were not happening on the same level and sometimes there was more friction between Mexico City and the U.S. than there was in the Monterrey area because they were so tied to our economy in so many ways. Monterrey developed separately from Mexico City; it was not an off-shoot of Mexico City. It was developing; at the same time it had a whole different orientation to the world than Mexico City. There was always a certain number of conflicts between the Mexico City mentality and the Northern mentality. The Northern people called it Northern Mexico City, _____ and the Mexico

City people called them Northern people _____. Neither of those epitaphs was intended to be complimentary.

Q: In the four years you were there in Monterrey, what would you pick as one of the most successful cultural events that the consulate sponsored?

BROWN: I think I would have to pick the Iowa State Band as showing the most impact because of the musical instruments exchange and the great reception that they got. They were the first brought down. I have to give credit to Monterrey Tech because they were the ones who asked them to come the first time. We got involved because we had to help them get across the border and do their thing. But once they got there and connected with us we were able to do another concert two years later and we got 150 musical instruments in the bargain.

Q: That's great. Is there anything else left on Monterrey that we didn't touch?

BROWN: I guess not. I haven't mentioned the hurricane. Maybe it is worth some mention there. Hurricane Gilbert did a lot of damage in Monterrey. The river was flooding and wiped out lives and enterprises that had developed and there were people living in the river. They had a dozen soccer fields that were overrun. There had never been any flooding for twenty years. Then when the hurricane came it went into flood stage. I think about 200 lives were lost and people were trying to cross the river in buses and cars when in the place where they were crossing they had no bridge. It washed away a lot of poor people's homes in the riverbed.

Q: Yeah, Hurricane Gilbert was September 17, 1988. Would that have provided an opportunity again for Mexican-American cultural interactions?

BROWN: There was a relief effort. We got involved with a container of used clothing, which was sent down for the people who had lost everything in the river. We had to distribute that. Anyway, I had forms but I had no part in it. I was involved with the consular things that were going on. I don't think there was anything else while I was there.

Q: We were talking about John Bennett as the consul general. Were there any other officers that particularly stood out or were particularly awful to the USIA program?

BROWN: The head of the consular division was very helpful in helping people. We wanted to move, to get visas for their activities in the States and they were helpful. I didn't have any name that really stands out except John Bennett. It was really fun and I had good colleagues there.

I

Q: As this tour comes to an end in 1990 your next assignment is Managua, Nicaragua. How did that become available?

BROWN: Through the general assignment process the agency posted openings in the time they were open and this one coincided with my timing, as well as coinciding with my interest in moving up and broadening my works of operation. The country_____ was a coveted position with people in my work; it was a natural climax in terms of career. It was what I had worked up to through my other experiences, most of which had been classified as being the assistant CAO. I basically knew all the aspects and this was a chance to make a contribution.

Q: This is a particularly interesting time for Nicaragua because the whole Sandinista and Civil War situation has run its course and the Americans were very involved in that. When you arrived what was the shape of the country?

BROWN: I compared the economy to a buzzard hovering over a dead palm tree. Even the buzzards didn't have anything to eat. The economy was just gone; there was no economy; it was total misery. The Sandinista government had basically destroyed most everything but then when they left they made a point to destroy everything that they could on the way out. They destroyed all the office equipment, computers, everything. They ripped the toilet fittings out of the schools; I know schools that had no bathrooms. They had no chairs. The kids would be seen carrying their chair from home every day to school so they'd have a place to sit. Then they'd have to take it home at night in order for it to be there for the next day. One of the church buildings, my church, that they had confiscated was left in such ruin that it had to be totally revamped. They had taken away the fence around it; they had taken out all of the electrical fittings of the toilet and the kitchen equipment. They had even pulled the wires out of the conduits. That's the state that the Marxist government left that country in. There were a lot of scholarship students in Russia that had been sent there while the regime was popular and the new government didn't have the money to bring them back. The Russians refused to pay for it so the U.S. government actually paid to get those students back home to Nicaragua.

Q: Sounds like pretty desperate circumstances. In that kind of a circumstance well let's see the U.S. embassy hadn't been there during all this period or had it? I've forgotten.

BROWN: It had not been operating. When I arrived they were trying to get it back in motion. They had brought in temporary people on temporary assignments from the regional embassies to help get it started and get the work going again. By the time I got there it was working fairly well but all the people were leaving and going back to their original embassy assignments. I had a good staff; two or three of them were new but they were excellent. We were able to go to work right away and get some registers identified and nominated and started doing things with the universities and building their libraries, finding some textbooks for them and a number of things like that.

Q: Well, that was pretty amazing because I think what you are talking about was restarting a program that had been in abeyance for many years.

BROWN: Right.

Q: So how did you find the candidates?

BROWN: I guess I was just lucky. There were already a couple of good people who had been hired and one of them was just leaving. He had been _____ my cultural assistant, educational assistant. We were able to get a professor from one of the universities who was in good contact with people in other universities. So that was a real God send. One girl's family had gone to the U.S., but her family had gone to Canada when things got bad. The landowners and plantation owners all had to leave the country or get killed; Her family went to Canada. She came back to see what she could learn about her property and so forth; she just wanted to be back in her home country. She had a degree in _____ and came to the embassy looking for work and she turned out to be an outstanding helper from the time she started with me. She eventually went back to Canada. They never did come back and claim their land.

Q: There probably hadn't been any international visitor nominations out of Managua for years and yet in a fairly short period of time you were able to make some nominations. Is that your staff's work or how did you pull that off?

BROWN: It is to their credit because they were helpful in knowing who people were and how to find logical candidates. They knew the university; they knew the country which is not a huge country. Most of the intellectual activity was in Managua so they didn't have any trouble. We were able to fill all of our slots where we had finance for visitors and _____. They did a good job. I think we did it because the local staff did it; they were excellent.

Q: What was the local political environment that you were working in? The civil war is over, they've just had an election that brought Mrs. Chamorro into office but was anything working? Or what were the politics like?

BROWN: Yeah, politics were very confused because Mrs. Violeta Chamorro's family was divided right with the country. Her husband had been killed by the revolutionaries; he had run the Opposition newspaper. It was against the Somoza and also against the Somoza that had killed him before the revolution. The family was down the middle: some of them were Sandinistas and some were totally for the Democratic regime that they tried to establish after Somoza was driven out. She and one of her sons continued to run the major newspaper in the country and one of her other sons ran the opposition newspaper which was called La Barricada, The Barricade. So they would meet every Sunday for dinner at the same table but they never could agree on politics.

She also maintains she left the security and the military forces under Sandinista leaders. I guess she was just very idealistic thinking she could establish a bipartisan type of government but it didn't work. Every time a certain holiday would come up that was important to the Sandinistas they would create a lot of damage; they would barricade all of the roads and burn vehicles and create a lot of chaos. Daniel, what's his name now---

Q: Ortega?

BROWN:---the Sandinista, the guy who was kicked out, said they would rule from the _____; even when they were voted out they would find ways to rule from the _____ and they did that. They made gradual progress economically and politically and while I was there things got better. There were, however, a lot of demonstrations and some of them were quite serious.

Q: Anything that damaged embassy property or put people at risk?

Q: I never felt threatened even when there were barricades in the street. I was able to get to work by a circuitous route. I never felt threatened but there were a few deaths and a lot of property damage in some of the biggest demonstrations. There were other demonstrations where they just burned a few cars in the streets but they didn't amount to anything. Then the army would come in afterwards and clean everything up so they cooperated with the president. She put them in a position where they could have easily overturned the government. It became evident that they didn't want to do that; they just wanted to cause trouble. They did restore order when she demanded it instead of refusing because then it would have been over for her. It was a very curious thing.

In one meeting the head of the military who was Sandinista, had all the military officers gathered in a _____ academy and he asked them, "How many of you have studied or had training in Russia or Cuba?" Almost all of them raised their hands. Then he asked, "How many of you would be willing to go back?" Not a single hand was raised. The people I was well acquainted with said that it was better living under Somoza than it was under the Sandinista regime as bad as Somoza was and Somoza was a terrible dictator. As long as you stayed out of his way and he didn't want your property there was economic growth. There were a lot of good things happening, but he had the belief that, like most revolutions that are started in the world, except for the American Revolution, the people always end up with a government afterwards worse than they had before.

Q: The embassy would have been equally new to this environment. When you first arrived, who was in charge of the embassy?

BROWN: He was a person who had been especially called out of retirement to come and lead that embassy because of its special problems. He was a senior career diplomat.

Q: You are thinking of Ambassador Shlaudeman?

BROWN: That's right Shlaudeman. As I remember he had retired and they got him to come back to take that job; they thought it was that important. I think he did a grand job of doing the impossible in a situation that was very difficult.

Q: What would you particularly point to illustrate your point that it was difficult and that he was good?

BROWN: It was difficult because of the condition of the country and the fact that the Sandinistas were still half-way in charge. It made everything else more difficult than if you were working with a unified democratic regime that had broad support. That was not the case. The coalition Democratic organization that finally got together and voted Daniel Ortega out of office was not unified efficiently to support the new government once they had kicked out the old one. They were also in disarray.

Q: It must have been difficult for everybody in the embassy. So how did Ambassador Shlaudeman keep up morale?

BROWN: Well, he had a person in the personnel department who was in charge of morale. Fortunately we had a compound which had been the former embassy. It had been turned into a recreation facility for the employees. It was protected by high walls and it had controlled access so we had some excellent facilities for socializing; we had a good swimming pool, tennis courts and softball field. The Marine House was in that location. They showed American movies every week, and had a lot of activities there in what was called Casa Grande, the former ambassador's residence; it was like a small country club for the Mission and that helped. It also served as the previous ambassador's residence where it served as a house for coming and going officers and visitors. Everybody was eager to help the country get on its feet. There was a lot of incentive to make things work; morale was not a terrible problem.

Q: Before the ambassador arrived John Leonard I think was the charge. What was he like to work with?

BROWN: That was before my time I believe. If it wasn't I don't have a---

Q: While you were there maybe it was Goddard, Ron Goddard?

BROWN: I don't know. Shlaudeman came later. I only remember him; I don't remember any other ambassador or Charge. I think the ambassador was there when I got there.

Q: The PAO was Steadman Howard, I think. Was he there when you arrived?

BROWN: He was there when I arrived but he was new and his experience had mostly been in Africa. His Spanish was not as good as mine so he leaned on me there. Stead was a wonderful person to work with. He was very smart about administrative things. He had been an administrative officer for his other duties so he knew how to make things work the proper way and he was the most dedicated and enabled boss that I'd ever had.

Q: Did he have specific ideas and suggestions that were particularly helpful in this difficult environment?

BROWN: Not that I remember. In that sense we were just all in it together figuring things out as we went. He leaned on me for the cultural stuff because he trusted me on that and he was very good on the administrative side. One of our staff had been charged when he

got this assignment to reestablish the BNC which had been destroyed in the earthquake back in---when was it? '71? or something like that. So he put me in charge of recreating the Binational Center. We worked on it for the two years we were there. We had a place to work, a curriculum; we had staff schedules and everything but it hadn't opened when we had left.

Q: How about Washington support for what is basically a totally new mission? Had USIA Washington been told whatever you guys want, give it to them?

BROWN: We operated just like we did in the other posts. We had what was called a country plan that we used to tell them what we needed a year in advance. Then they would do their best to provide it. In that sense it wasn't that different. They gave us the financial support that we needed for exchanges for their visitors and for the specialists we had come down.

Q: This is Nicaragua. After this whole Iran-Contra Civil War how do you think the Mission did setting up a new profile for America?

BROWN: I think the Mission did well. The reestablishment of the American embassy was important. We could really do the things we needed to do and wanted to do. We did as much as could be done.

Q: I gather the impression you had was that there was no problem getting around town and seeing people?

BROWN: No, and quite a few of the people I worked with had been active Sandinistas. One person who had been in charge of the English teaching program took over in English teaching for foreigners. The program for Nicaraguans had been moved from the Binational Center when it was destroyed to the American School. The head of that had been a Sandinista supporter but I was able to work with him as we arranged to put that English program back into the BNC and consolidate another small program that popped up. Instead of competing with them we built them back into the BNC program so there was no competition. The school was glad to give up the program and the woman could start her own English school. She was going to move into the BNC with her teachers and not feel like she had been sabotaged.

Q: Ambassador Shlaudeman departed in March of 1992. Did the local politicians give him farewell parties or acknowledge his efforts?

BROWN: I don't have any recollection about that.

Q: You leave then in the summer turnover of '92 and come back to Washington but my notes say you came back without an assignment. Why was that the case?

BROWN: This was one of the most difficult parts of my whole career. I had temporary assignments and took a lot of leave that I had accumulated for medical and other reasons.

I just kept getting kicked around and then when the year was over I was asked to account for the fact that I didn't have an OER (now EER "Employee Efficiency Report"). There was no personnel report for that period so I wrote a long memorandum explaining exactly where I had been during the whole period and in which assignments. I covered the time between assignment and the leave time I had taken. I concluded that they were trying to get me to retire early. This was the period when they were reducing the government in some ways drastically. They had several windows of opportunity for retirement but I didn't qualify for any of those. I felt like I was being kicked around and that they were hoping I would retire but I didn't. I finally got a job in the Arts Department shipping Art exhibits to Africa.

Q: The Arts in America Department? How does that fit into the organizational structure?

BROWN: It was part of the cultural arm of the agency; English teaching was another cultural arm; Arts in America did a number of things. The office that I was attached to did nothing but send art abroad. They organized the exhibitions of the American Art we sent to different areas. They had somebody in charge of each area promoting art exhibits in that area; I was assigned to Africa because that's what was open. I often collaborated with the person in charge of Latin America because of my Spanish. They needed help with the catalog or communications; anybody who needed Spanish could call on me. I learned what I could about Africa as fast as I could and I learned about the art as fast as I could. I made a success out of that job partly because it was based under my grade level and that was a good assignment when I finally got into it.

Q: How was that organized? Did the Africa section have a director and the Latin American section have a director or one arts director?

BROWN: The head of Arts in America at the time was a person named Robin---oh dear, I can't remember his surname. I had two officers above me. There was the director of that division and the deputy director and her name was Susan Stern. She had been, I think, a State Department Foreign Service Officer. Anyway, they treated me professionally and helped me learn the job and we got along fine. I learned how to deal with the art people who organized the exhibition. I put a catalog together and communicated with the post in Africa that wanted it. I had to take great pains with how it was shipped and insured and everything like that. There was a lot of administrative work involved but the exhibits were successful.

I got a special assignment while I was in that office where they had a book that they gave to all the embassies overseas. It was about how to handle these priceless art exhibits to be sure that there was no damage to things like that. We had to keep them out of the sunlight and make sure they were hung in places where there was no natural light and all kinds of precautions about handling and shipping. They had me rewrite that whole booklet so I did that in between my exhibit work; I reworked that manual for them. I had my retirement party in that office with only a half dozen people there.

Q: In an earlier discussion you were saying you were honored for your assignment to the Jakarta Binational Center and returned in 1994.

BROWN: I was committed by USIA to accept an invitation from the Jakarta BNC to go with my wife to the dedication of their new headquarters which they had built after I had left. When I left Jakarta we had the plans completed and were saving \$10,000 a month toward building a new headquarters because the headquarters where we were stationed had been zoned for other purposes and the government had asked us to move. So that building's plan was complete and we were raising money to do it. By then it was 1994. That was 19 years later, or something like that, after I had left Jakarta. They had a new and much larger headquarters building which they were dedicating. They invited me and my wife to return at their expense so that was a distinct honor. There were no other former directors invited. I always wondered about that. They only invited me and my wife and they gave us red carpet treatment, sent us out around the country and to other BNCs and even a trip to Bali for vacation time. It was very special.

Q: At these ceremonies there would be a ceremony representative there too, the PAO or the Cultural Affairs officer, right?

BROWN: Yes, the Cultural Affairs Officer in Jakarta at the time I went back was a close friend. He had been a junior officer at that same embassy when I was there setting up the BNC. We used to ride to work together. He was the CAO that helped me with that second visit. I don't remember how much we said about the fact that when the BNC became independently and financially wealthy they severed ties with USIS and became totally independent. There was not a good relation between USIS and the Center for these intervening years.

About the time I went back the USIS officer had swallowed his pride and gone back to the BNC and reestablished a good working relationship. It didn't involve any financial support from USIS, which had been the case before, but there was a lot to be gained in cooperation between the two institutions. I was given a copy of the memo that the PAO wrote back to Washington to explain this reconciliation.

Q: That's a good Foreign Service story. There are times when you meet back up with your junior officer. You retired in August of 1995.

What have you been doing in retirement? Have you been using your Foreign Service skills?

BROWN: Well, I was in...

Q: Bob you are breaking up for some reason.

BROWN: You want to call me again?

Q: I'll tell you what. We are just in the last section , Why don't we just go ahead and stop here and you can just add.

What's going to happen now is you are going to get a transcript emailed to you and your job is going to clean it up, get the names right and whatnot and maybe add a couple more stories that we didn't quite get to, or you just remembered or whatnot. To that extent put in one last question on what you did in retirement, which I assume would also mention that you guys get together there in Utah from time to time---the old Foreign Service officers---and tell war stories.

BROWN: Right.

Q: So why don't we just leave it at that? This has been absolutely fascinating. I particularly challenge you to really look at the Nicaragua section because this country was almost prostrate, nothing was happening economically, culturally or whatnot. You people came in with this ambassador who was brought out of retirement and you built the whole complete structure and I think that's a good story.

BROWN: Okay that'll give me a chance---

Q: Okay, thank you and you have a good day now.

BROWN: You too.

Q: Thanks Bob.

BROWN: Bye, bye.

End of interview