

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

AMBASSADOR PETER CHAVEAS

*Interviewed by: David Reuther
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INTERVIEW

Q: Okay. Today is March 10, this is the Foreign Affairs oral history program interview with Peter Chaveas. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm David Ruther. Peter, we always like to start with some basics. Where were you born?

CHAVEAS: I am always proud to say that I was born in the oldest continuously operating hospital in the United States, Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia, founded by Ben Franklin.

Q: And on your father's side, what is the background of the family?

CHAVEAS: For a long time, that was shrouded in mystery and to some extent still is. I've done a lot of research since my paternal grandfather passed away in 1966 and learned at least some of the mystery. I did not know my father's father well. When I was one year old, he and my grandmother moved to California. We were on the East Coast, and after they moved, I only saw them three times before he died. I believe the last time I saw him was when I was about eleven. But I grew up believing, as did almost everybody in the family, that he had been born in Paris, and that his accent was to be explained by the fact that he had grown up in Argentina. When he died, my grandmother was released from her vow of silence and we learned that he had never been to France, never been to Argentina in his life.

He was a Mexican immigrant. And, you know, you can well imagine, given when he came to the States in 1915, that there were reasons to try and hide that particular background. So anyway, that revealed part of the mystery rather. And as I have done more and more research, I have discovered that his father was almost purebred Mexican Indian. His mother, again part of his story, was named Rose Bouret. The timing could have meant that she was French. That sounds like a French name and the dates were such that she might have been there, incident to the Maximilian period in Mexico. And my grandfather used the middle name Bouret.

Well, I have since discovered that that was bogus as well. His grandmother's maiden name was actually Rosa Barreta, very much a Mexican name. And you know, I'm not sure there isn't a whole lot more to be dug up, but it makes for a very interesting story. But part of it, part of the results of that is that although I am one quarter Mexican, and therefore could very easily be classified as a Hispanic, I have never made any effort whatsoever to claim that. I did not know the language, still don't know the language. I did not grow up in the culture. So, that was kind of a strange part of my background. Actually, in high school, I opted to take French language because I thought that my grandfather was French by background. But anyway, there we are.

His wife, my grandmother, was the only one of my grandparents who was born in this country. And her side of the family goes back---there are Scots in there, a lot of German. The earliest part of that family that I can find were folks that came from the Stuttgart area of Germany, probably around the 1840s. On my mother's side, I'm Irish, of the Northern variety. Both of my grandparents immigrated to this country in the 1910s. They met here, not in Ireland. And so on that side of the family we're totally Irish, except of the northern Protestant variety. That means that if you go back a few more generations you'll find Scots.

Q: And what was your father's occupation?

CHAVEAS: Well, he had two distinct periods in his work. From the time I was born until I was about to go away to college, he had management level jobs, principally, in the bedding industry. He ran a number of plants around the Philadelphia area, in that profession, and we briefly, very briefly, when I was nine years old, moved to Indianapolis for three months so that he could pursue a job out there. My mother was never happy with that move and never let him forget it. She eventually prevailed and we moved back to the same town that we had left three months earlier. But when I was getting ready to go to college, he faced the prospect, not only of paying for me to go to college, but my two younger brothers to do the same in quick succession after me, he said, "I had better find myself some additional income".

And so, he started teaching night school at a branch of Penn State University, which happened to operate out of the high school that I attended. He started teaching various business courses, principally accounting courses. He never got his CPA [certified public accountant], but he had a certificate in accounting from the Wharton School. And he discovered that he really enjoyed teaching and then, as things moved on, and he no longer had the burden of the expense of me and my brothers in college, he moved into a full-time job. Then a good friend who had just been chosen to be the first president of a new community college in New Jersey, Burlington County Community College, asked him to be the dean of administration. And he took that job, loved it, quite literally saw that college out of the ground.

From the ground up, he was deeply involved in all the construction and various other activities around administration of that. And he was very proud of the fact that at that time, he was the only dean of any college level institution in the country that did not

himself have a college degree. He had a certificate in accounting but it didn't qualify as a bachelor's degree. And then after that, he became the Executive Director of the College of Physicians in Philadelphia, which is the certifying institution for all internists in the eastern part of the country. And it was a continuing education program for physicians. He worked with some pretty high-powered physicians in the Philadelphia area. And that was pretty much the last full-time job that he had. He had some other part time things along the way.

Q: What did your mother do then these years, raising three boys?

CHAVEAS: Well, my mother had an interesting history, academically. But the story is, as I understand it, that when she was a junior in high school, she was offered a full scholarship to Drexel Tech, which is now Drexel University in Philadelphia, to study engineering. And at that time, it was extraordinary enough for a woman to go to college for anything. But particularly, to go for engineering was really quite exceptional. But there was one condition that she was unable to meet. The scholarship, I don't know who offered it, but one of the requirements was that she graduate from the high school that she was then attending.

And her parents already had plans to move. This high school was in the suburbs of Philadelphia. They were moving into Philadelphia. A friend in this area in the suburbs offered to keep my mother for a year, so she could complete her senior year. But her parents were of the view that it would all be a waste. She would get married, have children and never practice her profession. So, she didn't do that. During the war, she actually ended up in the war industry. She worked for either Westinghouse or GE [General Electric] as draftsperson. But when my father returned from the war, he was adamant that he would be the household moneymaker, and that he expected his wife to be a housekeeper and she swallowed that.

Q: So, he went off to war?

CHAVEAS: He went into the Army in '42. Was a supply officer in the Signal Corps. He did not go over on D-Day. He went over several days later, but then, was in France for a period and then was sent back to England to serve as the liaison officer to another company that was coming over. And on the way back to France, the ship he was on hit a mine. He had absolutely no memory of what happened. He only knows what was related to him by other people. But apparently, the story was that he was up on deck when this happened. He was blown against the wall. A ship's railing followed very quickly afterwards and hit him across the legs. And that was the end of his war, he came home.

Q: So, you were raised in the Philadelphia area. Did you go to the same elementary school, junior high, high school in the same area?

CHAVEAS: My parents, right after I was born, very briefly lived with my father's parents, and then moved out to an area called Drexel Hill. We lived out there until about the time my brother was born. My first brother was born in 1948. We moved to

Springfield. We lived in two different houses over the coming years. All the years that I was growing up, I went to Springfield public schools. And then, my parents still lived there until I was in the Peace Corps. And that was the point at which my father became involved with Burlington County Community College. They moved to New Jersey. When I came home from the Peace Corps, flew into New York, rented a car and when I got to the town that they were now in, I had to ask a policeman how to find my parent's house.

Q: Well, in junior high school, did you consider yourself a heavy reader?

CHAVEAS: I think I have always been a heavy reader. I can remember that very early on, I used to read *Time Magazine* cover to cover every week. But also, I became a great consumer of history books, particularly enjoyed biographies, and I started my lifelong interest in Civil War history.

Q: Now, by the time you were a senior in high school, the civil rights movement started hitting the news headlines and James Meredith was admitted to the University of Mississippi in October 1962 ---were you aware of those movements in the area you were in.

CHAVEAS: I was very much so, which in some respects, I don't know where it came from. I grew up in a town which at that time was lily white. There was not anyone of a different complexion living in the town. There was a town, just next town over, that was heavily African American. To my knowledge, the very first black to move into our town occurred when, I think, it was when I was a senior in high school, or maybe my first year in college. And the individual and his family who moved in were moved really by the church that I had attended all my years growing up. He had been the custodian at the church for quite a few years but was always commuting from quite a distance away. The church, very carefully, and by that, I mean, they were very careful to consult people that lived in the neighborhood before committing to anything, but ultimately, with the help of the church, the family moved into a house quite near the church.

That was the first black family to my knowledge that ever lived in Springfield. And I don't know that there was ever any pushback on it at all. I think that was probably aided by the fact that one of the sons who was a freshman at that time was a superb halfback. And our high school took sports pretty darn seriously. Nonetheless, I developed an awareness before that. I think maybe because I did things like read voraciously and watch the news every evening. And, I was just talking to my grandson this morning, my oldest grandson, and telling him that one of my great regrets from that period was that I did not go to the March on Washington in '63.

I was just out of high school. I graduated that year. I had my first full time job before going to college. I was working in a bubble gum factory. And if I had gone on the March---number one, I knew my parents would not be happy with that at all. I don't think because they particularly objected to the idea of the March, but they feared that it would be dangerous. But I guess, more importantly, because I would have had to quit my job early. They wouldn't have given me any leave to do it. And I had no idea at that point

how much money I was going to need to live at college. My parents were taking care of all the basic expenses, but still, I needed some money, and I was risk averse on that point.

Q: Now, during your high school, was there a particular teacher that mentored you or encouraged you?

CHAVEAS: When I was sworn in as an ambassador for the first time, to go to Malawi, I decided that I wanted to invite four teachers who I thought had been particularly significant to me in my younger years. Three of them were college professors. And for various reasons, none of them were able to attend. But the one that I was happiest to be able to get there was my eighth grade English and Social Studies teacher, Miss Pade. Miss Pade was lifelong unmarried. When I reached out to her to invite her to the swearing-in ceremony, I had great difficulty finding her because she had changed school systems a year or two after she taught me. She had moved and so on. But anyway, I eventually tracked her down. And when I did, we had a telephone conversation. A fairly lengthy one.

First, because it took her a while to place me. It took her a while to figure out who I was and when we had interacted, but anyway, we got over that. And then, you know, I told her about what I had done with my life and told her that I wanted her to come to this ceremony. And she was just blown away by the invitation. When we finally got ready to end the conversation, she said, "I want to thank you for this, you have made my day. No, you have made my year. No, you've made my life". And she went on to explain that it is not unusual for people, as they advance through their career, to stay in touch with some college professor, who had been particularly important. But for an eighth-grade teacher to know that she had a real impact on somebody, who had had whatever degree of success I had had, really, really was important to her.

And she came to the ceremony. I made a big deal about introducing her. And I made two points about her. First, she encouraged my interest in history. Second, she had really been the one who had taught me how to write properly. We were not permitted to write or speak in anything other than full sentences in her class. If you wrote something with a grammar or spelling mistake in it, that was automatically one grade reduction. She was tough as nails, and I know many of my classmates didn't appreciate it in the least. And I'm not sure I always did either. But I certainly came to appreciate it and I believe, I think, I have always been recognized throughout my career as being a pretty good writer.

Q: That's absolutely fabulous. Now, your next stop is Denison University. How did you select that?

CHAVEAS: Almost out of desperation. I was not a brilliant high school student. I finished in the top third of my high school class. I did have very good SAT [scholastic aptitude test] scores, and I thought I wanted to be a history major. And my first choice was to go to William & Mary, but I was not accepted. I don't remember what my backups were at all or what happened there anyway, but a bit late in the game, I suddenly found myself without a good fallback. And so, I talked to one of the high school counselors at

my high school and both of her children had gone to Denison University. So, she pushed me in that direction. I had never been there before, and indeed, I never got there until after I had been accepted. But I did know that it had a very, very good reputation for its history department.

And although I did not end up as a history major, I really, ultimately, chose it for that reason. Looking back on it, if I had to do it over again, I would have gone elsewhere. And that is not because I didn't get a good education there, I most certainly did, and I had some outstanding professors. But there were two characteristics of Denison that just didn't fit me. Number one, there was a terrible lack of diversity on the campus. The first year I was there, there were a total of four black students. Only one of them was an African American. One was a Kenyan, and the other two were two sisters from the royal family of Ethiopia. By the time I was a sophomore, they had all moved on. It was a totally white campus, and it was a campus utterly dominated by fraternities and sororities. And that really didn't interest me.

When I arrived there, over ninety percent of each class, in living memory, had pledged one of the Greeks. My class was seen as a bit of a rebellious group because I think only eighty-seven percent of us did. But that was a problem in two ways from my perspective. Number one, the fraternities and sororities dominated all of the social life on the campus. And if you weren't in it, you were left out of an awful lot of things. But I think more importantly, to my mind, was that, you know, one of the great values of a college experience is your fellow students. The opportunities that you have for all kinds of conversations and interactions with your fellow students.

And certainly, those kinds of things took place on the Denison campus, but they tended to be within the confines of the sororities and fraternities. I found it so limiting. And that combined with the fact that Granville was in a very, very small town with very poor connections of any kind, anything larger. I had no car. By the second semester of my sophomore year---actually, the first semester I guess---I had decided that I was going to get out in one way or another. I contemplated seriously transferring, but thanks to one of those four teachers that I mentioned earlier, I ended up going on a junior year abroad program to Switzerland. I did come back to Denison to finish my senior year, but that break really, really helped me along and it has had great value in and of itself.

Q: Now, you entered Denison in September 1963.

CHAVEAS: Right.

Q: In November, Kennedy was assassinated. How did that---

CHAVEAS: I remember that so well, so well. I came out of a one o'clock class, Professor Pollock's course in Western Civilization and was walking from the classroom to my dorm. And there was a flow of students coming in the opposite direction, going to their next class, and they had all heard the news already. At that point, I don't think it had been confirmed that he was dead but that came very shortly thereafter. I remember that

weekend, a number of Denison students took off for Washington to be able to go to the funeral. There was an abundance of churches in this little town in central Ohio, and every one of them had some kind of memorial service. And it had a big impact on anybody my age, that was an event we will never forget.

Q: You are talking about the lack of diversity on campus, but Denison is down as one of the stops in the Underground Railroad.

CHAVEAS: It was indeed and there was a strong missionary history related to the village of Granville and to the university, which dated back to the 1830s. Granville had been settled originally by settlers from Granville, Massachusetts. Hence the name. And a lot of missionary and abolitionist connections there. And I should add that Denison as I know it today, I don't have any real close association with it anymore but it is a much more diverse institution than it was. A far better, frankly, academic institution than it used to be. And today, only thirty something percent of students at Denison are in a fraternity or sorority.

Q: Now, in 1964, was the presidential election, and that was Johnson versus Goldwater.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: Did contemporary politics at that time reverberate on campus?

CHAVEAS: It reverberated an awful lot with me personally. While campuses across the county were convulsed by conflict over the Vietnam War, Denison was pretty much isolated and behind the curve on that. We did begin to get some of that in the last year that I was there. There were some minor demonstrations and teach-ins and whatnot. And I think it was the semester just after I graduated that a number of the students threatened to go on strike. The president of Denison's response to that was that he had every intention of keeping the school open because he wanted his students to have the choice of striking against something.

But no, it didn't have a big impact on our campus except that as was the case with any American male at that time, you always had the draft in the back of your mind. And it did impact the decisions that people made. The election of '64 itself was a real point of change for me and my thinking about politics. I had grown up in an Eisenhower Republican home. And my first memory of any political activism was in '56, I was ten years old. I was organizing my friends around the neighborhood to decorate their bikes and wagons with "I Like Ike" stickers and we would parade around the neighborhood.

But the Goldwater candidacy really changed my view of the Republican Party. The Goldwater message just did not resonate, in the least. I became a Democrat and remain a Democrat. In retirement, I became much more active here in Brevard, NC, my current hometown, in Democratic politics. Not seeking office but in supportive roles. I was a precinct captain of the local Democratic Party for a number of years.

Q: You were saying that this junior abroad was very helpful and encouraging. Now, it was in Basel, Switzerland?

CHAVEAS: Exactly. I should back up a little. As I had mentioned before, I went to Denison with the intention of being a history major, and it was an excellent department, but I did not declare my major immediately. In my first semester of my sophomore year, I had the Introduction to Government course which was taught by one of those four teachers that I wanted to be at my swearing in, Professor Louis Brakeman. I thoroughly enjoyed his course and shortly afterwards told them that I wanted to talk about becoming a government major. At that time, they called the department Government. They later changed it to Political Science. And he said, "Yeah, welcome aboard".

He was very encouraging. He became my advisor for the balance of my years at Denison. But one of the great things he did for me was that my sophomore year---second semester, sophomore year---he and I went to a conference in Cincinnati. I don't remember the subject. It was international affairs related. He drove us down and in the course of that trip, he introduced me to the idea of this particular program overseas in Basel. At that time, it was not very easy for students other than language majors, or English majors who wanted to go to England, to go on a junior year abroad program. There weren't many available.

But the program I went on was unique. It had an association with the University of Basel, but it was a totally independent institution. There were only thirty-six students, they were all Americans, from a variety of schools from Western Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and some others in that general area. We had our own building. The program was led by Dr. Hoke Smith, who was another one of those four and he was from Hiram College. The central theme of the program was European cooperation and unification. We studied German, but that was just one course---and Switzerland, Basel, Switzerland is not the best place to try and learn German. They speak a dialect which most Germans look askance at.

But, you know, while I greatly enjoyed the academics that particular year, a tremendous experience was living with a Swiss family. My Swiss father, as I referred to him, was a Swiss border guard. And I lived in their apartment, government apartment, quite literally on the French border. I could spit out the back window of my bedroom into France. And these people were delightful, they were really good to me. And so, I enjoyed that experience thoroughly. I stayed in touch with them. They are both deceased now but right up to the end, we had contact with them. They visited us two or three times in Africa, visited us while we were posted in Lyon, and came to the States as well. And we went back to Switzerland multiple times.

And then, it was a platform for tremendous travel, an array of travel experiences, a lot of them, either by train or hitchhiking. One of my principal objectives in all of this was to go to the Soviet Union. My parents were not initially very happy with this idea. In fact, it was still back in the era when you had to get permission forms from your parents for various things, and the college or the school in Basel required them to sign off on a whole

bunch of things. Initially, they declined to sign off on the trip to the Soviet Union. But over the course of the year, I managed to talk them down from that, and in the spring, I went to the Soviet Union.

The greatest thing that I got out of that whole year was that I learned that while I liked being a tourist---and I still like being a tourist---I had been a tourist many times as a child, I really enjoyed living in a foreign country. It was a much deeper experience, and I think that, although I didn't recognize it at that time, it was a very important step towards my eventual career in the Foreign Service.

Q: What was the particular course of study at the study center?

CHAVEAS: Well, we focused an awful lot on the institutions that were developing at that time to bring the European nations together, starting with things like the Marshall Plan and the degree to which we insisted that the Europeans work together to utilize that. The development of the Coal and Steel community, the EEC [European Economic Community] at that point, which was only six countries. We traveled at one point to visit institutions like the European Parliament in Strasbourg, to the European Commission headquarters in Brussels. And if I remember correctly, when we went on a stop in Paris, we were told by the guide that we were quite literally the last public group to be conducted through NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] headquarters in Paris. This was just before they left because de Gaulle insisted that they leave.

Q: While you were going to the university, in Denison, what did you do during the summers?

CHAVEAS: Well, I mentioned that the summer before I went to Denison, I worked in a chewing gum factory, a bubble gum factory. Then, I had two summers when I worked in what was at that time the largest industrial bakery in the country, Acme Stores bakery in Philadelphia, which was a whole education of a different kind. For one thing, I became a member of the American Bakery and Confectionery Workers Union. And I also, for a time, worked in a small firm that was assembling radio equipment for the U.S. military. My uncle was one of the partners in that business. And then, when I graduated from college and just before I went off to grad school, I worked in a dairy convenience store. And when the manager went on a bender and got fired, I suddenly, without any training whatsoever, became the manager of that store.

Q: Well, you were a college graduate, golly gee.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, right.

Q: Finally, when you graduated from Denison in June of '67, your degree by then was in political science?

CHAVEAS: Right, yeah.

Q: What then brought you to entering Rutgers University in September '67?

CHAVEAS: Well, again, the fourth of those professors that I mentioned earlier, Dr. Roy Morey, suggested that I consider the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers.. I had been seriously contemplating going to law school, and probably would have if one thing had panned out. I was a finalist for a Root-Tilden Scholarship at NYU [New York University], which was a great offer. It was basically three years, fully paid at NYU. Unfortunately, I was a finalist but did not win out. And while I was still admitted to NYU, and to Columbia, I can't remember how I ever thought I was going to pay for that. In addition, I was less and less enamored of the idea of staying in school for another three years, and the program at Rutgers, the particular program at Rutgers offered a one-year master's degree.

It was a rather unique experience. The Eagleton Institute was the result of the bequest of a very rich woman. She bequeathed both her mansion, which is on the Douglass campus of Rutgers University, and a very handsome endowment to establish the Institute. The founding director was Donald Herzberg. He'd had a career in various political positions---again, not as an elected official but as a staffer. He was the senior legislative assistant to Senator William Benton from Connecticut.

Don came to Rutgers to establish Eagleton, which was targeted at people who were interested in further education in politics and government, but not with the intention of going on in academia. Not people who were likely to seek a PhD and follow that career path but rather, people who wanted to be directly involved in some way in the political world. Don had his own background, but he was greatly aided by the fact that the deputy director of the Eagleton Institute was Jesse Unruh.

Jesse Unruh was at that time the Speaker of the House in California, and really one of the last big state bosses in Democratic politics. Jesse would come East once a month and teach one of our seminar sessions. And then, we would have dinner and drinks with Jesse, or often, he would bring along other political figures so that we had the opportunity to pick these people's brains, to interact with them, and hear about how they pursued their careers and why. There were only fifteen of us in this program and it was a tremendous experience. And one of the requirements for graduation was for a major project/paper and it had to be something that a political figure, an elected political figure, wanted you to do. I was the only one amongst the fifteen who had an international affair bent.

At that time, I took a particular interest in Senator William Fulbright's argument that part of the reason why we were in this quagmire in Vietnam, was that there had been inadequate involvement of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the decision-making process. I was very interested in investigating that proposition. I never actually met with Senator Fulbright, but I did have several interactions with one of his senior staffers, who was initially very, very helpful in this project. At the end of the first semester, as I was working my way through this, I went down to Washington again to meet with this fellow and kind of report on where I was at that point in my research and in my thinking about the issue.

I was at that point, pretty much concluding that the Senator was wrong because looking back on a whole series of critical decisions about the use of the American military overseas since the Second World War, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had rarely been very involved. Often their support was sought after the decision was made. And at that point, I was cut off. Fulbright's office didn't want to talk to me anymore and I had to find another sponsor. And I did find a sponsor, Senator Gale McGee, a Democrat from Wyoming. I never met the Senator but one of his staffers was very, very helpful and I went on with the project. Following its completion, I received a fairly lengthy letter from the Senator commenting on my final product.

Another one that was extremely helpful to me in all of this was Jesse Unruh. On my behalf, he wrote a personal letter to every member of the Senate and a number of members of the House who were relevant to my work, asking for their cooperation in my project. As a result of that, I got personal interviews with quite a number of those senators or members of their senior staff. I got an answer from virtually every single one of them to a questionnaire that I sent out. So, that was all input for my final product. I looked at five or six case studies dating back to the end of WWII and I consistently found that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to the extent that they were participants in any way, were late comers to the process. The basic decision had already been made before they were really in on it.

And then, we were asked to make some recommendations coming out of all of this. You may recall the Fulbright hearings on Vietnam which were televised on all of the networks, almost in toto, and included some very telling testimony by George Kennan were taking place at this time. That was a significant turning point in public opinion. I advocated, in my project, that rather than trying to inject themselves more into the details of the decision making on the executive side, that the Senate committees in general, could play a much greater role in public education about our foreign involvements. I don't think I would make the same recommendation today. Our politicians, our senators, and others love the camera too much, and they just are so inclined to turn such hearings into shows, partisan shows, that I don't think it adds as much as it might have back then. But anyway, that was a great experience.

Q: Yes, and it coincides in January 1968 with the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. Did the campus or the professors have a particular response to that?

CHAVEAS: There were a lot of discussion demonstrations, sit-ins and whatnot at Rutgers. Not to the level that we saw at some other universities, but it was very much there. And I became for a brief time, the president of Students for McCarthy on the Rutgers campus. I and one of my Eagleton colleagues launched that campaign. We were encouraged in this by Sam Brown. You may not remember that name, Sam was the national coordinator for Students for McCarthy. He had gone through the Eagleton program two years before us. And he was back to see us from time to time and to talk up our efforts.

Well, as a result of that, my colleague and I got to go to a smallish dinner in, I believe it was in New York, with McCarthy. I want to say there were something like thirty, thirty-five people participating in this. And then, also an opportunity to talk to McCarthy a bit afterwards. I must say, I came back from that experience quite disillusioned and shortly thereafter, stepped aside from that campaign. He started his speeches---and I had heard this before---trying to lecture the American people on the lessons of the Peloponnesian Wars and their relevance to Vietnam. I thought, well, if you are a history professor, that might be quite relevant. But if you are going to try and run for president, it is not going to sail.

And so, I went back with my fingers crossed that Bobby Kennedy would declare his candidacy, which of course he did. Another story about Jesse Unruh. I was in California, actually in San Francisco, on the day that Kennedy was shot. If you have seen, as you probably have, those movies of Kennedy delivering his victory address, the man just over his left shoulder is Jesse Unruh. Well, the day after that, the classmate with whom I was traveling and I were scheduled to have lunch with Jesse in Sacramento. That never happened.

Q: That was a momentous year because Dr. King was also assassinated.

CHAVEAS: I remember that extremely well too. Actually---this is a sidelight to that memory---but I actually lived in the mansion that housed the Eagleton Institute. Every year, one of the Fellows was given the opportunity to inhabit one of the very small, slightly large closet-like rooms that had been servants' quarters at one time. But I got to live in the building rent free. I was only there, I had no duties with respect to the building but the building, amongst other things, was filled with silver service and all kinds of valuable things. If there was somebody who could be identified as living in the building, it greatly decreased the insurance costs.

I happened to be standing in the lobby of the Institute on the night that that news came in. I was standing there. There was some non-Eagleton function going on in the building and I was chatting with some people that were involved. I don't remember the function but as we were standing there, a young African American fellow, maybe a student, more likely somebody from the neighborhood that was just below where the mansion is sited, came in and told us that Dr. King had been killed. And already, we could hear just down the hill, which was a predominantly African American community, a great deal of screaming and shouting. It was a horrible event.

Q: Well, let's take a break at this point, because the next section is a little bit longer and we can get back to it.

Q: Today is March 31. We are returning to our conversation with ambassador Chaveas. We stopped just as you had volunteered for the Peace Corps. How did, what brought that to your attention?

CHAVEAS: Well, I had been very struck by the earliest inklings of the Peace Corps, when Kennedy proposed it and started it. I just thought the idea was great. I was only in high school at the time. And that idea never really left me. It was my intention, almost from that point, to make that an early chapter of my life. I applied while I was at graduate school and got a notification that I had been accepted for a program starting in June of 1968.

I was told I was going to Chad. I actually knew where Chad was, mostly because I had been a stamp collector in my younger years. I ended up in Africa because when I filled out the application form, I asked myself what is the part of the world that I feel most ignorant of? And the real answer to that question was just about all of it but Africa certainly came to the forefront. And as you may know, Africa has always been the biggest focus of the Peace Corps' efforts so, there were plenty of opportunities out there.

Q: So, how did one apply for the Peace Corps in 1968?

CHAVEAS: As I recall, and this is where memory may not serve all that well, but there was simply an online form---well, not online, we didn't have that then---but there was a form you had to fill in with all kinds of information about yourself, your educational background. I think I probably had to say something about my motivation for going into the Peace Corps. And as I recall, that was about it. I don't recall there being any kind of test that you had to go through at that point. And there I was.

Q: Well now, were volunteers to Chad, at that time, lumped together or were you being trained with people who are going to do other postings?

CHAVEAS: There were only nine of us, all male, recruited to go to Chad for a particular program. But we were grouped together for training purposes, with much larger groups of volunteers going to the Côte d'Ivoire, and to Senegal. And there were also a couple of individuals going to other Francophone countries. But Francophone was the critical piece of that. We were all sent to Baker, Louisiana for immersion training in French. There was other training involved as well, but it was overwhelmingly this immersion program in French.

Baker, at least when I was there, was a downtrodden, extremely racist part of the country. There was a cross burning on the lawn of the training center for the group of trainees that was there immediately before I was. And there were various other very overt manifestations of racism directed at the Peace Corps volunteers, although hardly any of the volunteers were African American. There were a number of black teachers from Africa or from the Caribbean. And we were not made to feel very welcomed by the local population.

In fact, the Peace Corps decided after two iterations of training down there that it wasn't a good idea and they consolidated more of their training in the Virgin Islands. I should also note that Baker, Louisiana is the birthplace of our current ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield. She is younger, obviously than I am, and I didn't meet her at the time. She was in high school. And although we did have some visits by students---but they were students from a local black college in Louisiana---she would have been in high school at that time. And also, it was summer. But I should just mention here that although I never met Linda at that time, I did have a number of opportunities to interact with her subsequently. And most importantly, I would cite as evidence how really what a superior officer she is that she survived early in her career, an entire year of being supervised by Peter Chaveas. She was a rotational officer in Lagos at that time.

Q: That's a great recommendation. Now, what else did the training at Baker involve?

CHAVEAS: Well, there was some introduction to the culture of the countries that we were going to but for me, it involved one of the most important developments of my entire life. Like so many students in the United States who came out of high school and college with several years of language training, and virtually no knowledge of the language at all, I had come out of four years of French between high school and college. And when I was tested at the beginning of the session, I had a 0+.

However, there was another trainee. One of the trainees going to Senegal, Lucille McLean who came in and she tested with a 0. So, we were not in the same class during immersion, but we happened to be in classes that were right next to each other. And there was this very strict requirement to speak French while we were on campus. But if you went off campus, you could speak English. Well, these two classes kept running into each other during breaks, and we got very, very frustrated with repeatedly asking each other "what's your name?", "where do you come from?", and not being able to conduct much more conversation than that. So, one evening, after we had been there, maybe ten days, a whole group of us, the two classes together, decided we had to get off campus for a while. Go somewhere where we can have a beer, even though the beer was more expensive off campus, and just get to know each other better. And we went to a local black bar because that was the only place we could go, and purely by chance, Lucille McLean and I sat down next to each other. There was no intention on either of our parts. I don't think we really took much notice of each other before that incident. In June, we will celebrate fifty-two years of marriage.

Q: Some beer.

CHAVEAS: Yes. Well, there have been many beers since.

Q: Now, you were ultimately assigned as an agricultural extension volunteer. You were not from a farming family, so, what were you taught in the manner of agriculture?

CHAVEAS: Well, let me be completely upfront and say that the project that I was involved in was a total failure. And it was doomed from the start. It was ill conceived and

had recruited people very haphazardly who had, like me, no background whatsoever. I think I might have grown a few tomato plants in the backyard while growing up in suburban Philadelphia. My housemate, Rick Henkle, was a French major from Brown, so he had better language skills than I did.

Originally, there were nine of us---we were all recruited to be part of a well drilling program. And really, all that the well drilling program required was a certain amount of mechanical aptitude, which I think I did have, and some in-country training. The problem was that they had recruited nine trainees for the program, and there was only a need for six. They had assumed that three of us would drop out, that we would simply find it, for some reason or another, too difficult. In fact, only one dropped out because he just found it too difficult to advance in the French language. So suddenly, there was an excess of two volunteers.

Well, at the same time, there was another program up on the shores of Lake Chad which had been initiated in 1966, and had also been, for the most part, a pretty dramatic failure. And most of those volunteers had left early. There was one who had stuck it out, tried to figure out a way to make something out of it. And he identified irrigation as a central issue for developing agriculture in that area, and he was quite right in that regard. Working with another volunteer who was a mechanic in the local prefecture garage, they had put together a Rube Goldberg pump that would be used to raise water for irrigation by harnessing the power of a camel.

This was not an entirely unknown idea. There were similar pumps that were well established in North Africa, but this particular pump depended heavily on the fact that Chad was littered with broken down Peugeots and they tried to take the transmissions out of the carcasses of these things and turn them into the machinery for such a pump. Well, one of the guys in this program came down to Fort-Lamy knowing that there was this excess of volunteers for the well program and met with all of us, and told us about this great pump and the great possibilities for changing Lake Chad agriculture that he was working on. But he needed new volunteers because he was due to leave in a couple of months.

Well, all of us listened to the pitch. At the end of it he said, "Are there two of you who would find this interesting?". So, both Rick Henkle and I raised our hands and off we went to the north shore of Lake Chad to try and make this thing work. It didn't work. We kept trying. I recall what Einstein allegedly said about doing the same thing over and over again and expecting to get a different result. We certainly learned about that and the truth of it. But we persisted in trying to get this pump to work. And the Peace Corps, meanwhile, had become so enthusiastic about the project that they decided that the following summer it should be expanded significantly. So, they went ahead and recruited a larger group of volunteers to come up and expand the project.

I eventually, in March of 1970, went home. And at the same time, the Peace Corps finally was able to recruit a short-term volunteer engineer to look at this pump. And he pronounced it dead on arrival. It was never going to work. He re-engineered it but by the

time he was finished reengineering the whole thing, it was so costly that it was not viable from a cost standpoint. And in addition to that, Chad was beginning to show signs of the kind of internal and Libyan instigated violence that eventually created great chaos in that country. That would be some years in coming but it was already beginning at that time.

So, the Peace Corps, in terms of me changing Chad in any way, that didn't work out at all well. But I consider it one of the most significant experiences of my life. Aside from the fact that I met my life partner through it, I also learned an awful lot about myself. I learned how to take care of myself. I had to live for most of two years without the kinds of support structures that we are so used to in this country. I learned an awful lot about a part of the world that was, had been a total blank for me. And, you know, that's the kind of knowledge that is of great value regardless of what you do with the rest of your life. But I found it particularly invaluable during my Foreign Service career.

Q: Quickly, where and what kind of living conditions were you in and communications? Do you ever---

CHAVEAS: Well, living quarters, at first, I was in a town of about 2,000 people. It was a prefecture headquarters. I lived in a two-room mud hut and because of the heat, we had an enclosed compound around the back of the hut and we slept out in the open, in that enclosed area. It was simply too hot inside. We had, after about eighteen months in that situation, I moved along with my housemate and a bunch of the new volunteers out into very small villages. I was in a village with only sixteen grass huts. And I lived in a combination of a grass hut and a lean-to.

Q: How were you accepted by the local population?

CHAVEAS: Well, we found them quite friendly. I often asked myself when I first left, what did those people think of us? And even while we were there? And I had to conclude that they thought we were crazy, delusional. They knew very, very little of our society but they certainly knew that we lived well. They didn't know how well but certainly much better than they did. They knew we were better educated, and I think they found it hard to understand why we were there. Why would we do this? And that was somewhat exacerbated by the fact that we kept persisting in this obviously unworkable project.

So, in spite of that, you know, very friendly people. But there was a great barrier. There were very few people in the village who spoke anything other than the most rudimentary French. There were some government officials there that spoke French pretty well, and there were a couple of French volunteers. But for the most part, in communicating with the people, we were at great disadvantage because the local language, *Kanembu*, had never been in any Peace Corps training program. Such a program just didn't exist.

Eventually, the second group that came in did get training in *Kanembu*, because my roommate and I, we started out taking lessons from someone who we thought might be a competent teacher. And it didn't take us too long to realize that he was saying yes to

everything we said. So, right, wrong or in between, he was endorsing it all. So, that was not very fruitful but two other things came together.

Later, we managed to recruit an individual, who happened to be this first fellow's brother, who was quite well educated, spoke fluent French and a fair amount of English. And we recruited him to go to the United States and work with a former volunteer. That former volunteer had been part of that first group who had come to recognize how badly the program was going. And instead of persisting in it, he decided, I am going to master this language. And he did that by isolating himself in a very small *Kanembu* village. And he came out of that with a four in spoken *Kanembu*. He eventually came to be an outstanding scholar of several languages and cultures in that part of Africa. But his first next step was to go back to the States, work with the *Kanembu* fellow that we had identified and between them, they developed the first ever training program in *Kanembu* for the Peace Corps.

Q: The project that you were looking at was irrigation out of the lake. Was there a local attempt to create an irrigation system?

CHAVEAS: Yes. A little about the nature of agriculture up there. Lake Chad is a very shallow lake, and since I was there, it has dried up quite a bit. It no longer covers anywhere near the same area as it did at that time. It was very shallow and particularly along its north shore, the shoreline was very, very irregular. There were a lot of small inlets and islands. The United Nations had been sponsoring a program, a food for work program, for some years to close off those inlets and create *polders* which, of course, is a Dutch term. And that is the way the Dutch have built much of current day Holland. Once these areas were closed off, they were either pumped dry, or they dried up naturally.

And so, you had some dry land and because it had been a lake bed for a very long time, it had very rich soil. But how to most productively get water to it was the question. That was eased significantly by the fact that being so close to the lake and having recently been part of the lake, there was groundwater readily available. You did not have to go very deep to get to the groundwater. The locals had developed this system of baskets, they would have counterweighted baskets, and they would dip these very closely weaved baskets down into a well. And then, the counterweight would bring it up. The water would be dumped into a system of canals that they had created and distributed through the field.

The advantage of our pump, if it had worked as anticipated, would have been that we would have been able to roughly quadruple the amount of water that could be raised in any given period and therefore, obviously, permit local farmers to irrigate a larger expanse of land. There were all kinds of other problems related to this, not the least of which is that the lake has been progressively drying up. And so, the groundwater gets deeper and deeper, and you need---ultimately, they were using large mechanical pumps.

Just to give you an example, when I was in---the first town that I worked in, it was quite literally on the lake. I could easily walk from my house to the lake itself within less than

five minutes. Within a year after I had left, this was the great Sahel drought of the late '60s and early '70s, that lake was twenty-three kilometers, if I remember correctly, from the village. Now, it has gone back and forth over the years but the general trend has been towards the lake becoming smaller and smaller and therefore, agriculture in that area becoming less and less viable.

Q: What were the local crops then?

CHAVEAS: Primarily millet. And that was the staple of the area.

Q: While you were there, where was Lucille?

CHAVEAS: She was in Kédougou, Senegal. She was working in a social center. She taught some very basic literacy courses. She oversaw a kindergarten. She wasn't teaching kindergarten. They had a Senegalese who did the actual teaching but she was a supervisor of the program. She did things like maternal child health, baby weighing, something that she always found a little bizarre because here she was trying to teach these eighteen-year-old Senegalese women how to take care of a baby, and she was twenty-two, twenty-three and wasn't close to having a baby.

Q: Now, did you have an opportunity to interact with the embassy or foreign service officers at that time?

CHAVEAS: Yes, I did. It played an important role in my decision to enter the Foreign Service. For one thing, the Peace Corps director most of the time I was in country was an FSO [foreign service officer] named Charlie Steedman. Over the years, Charlie and I have stayed in touch.

And I always say to Charlie, you know, this may horrify you, but you were amongst the reasons, you were one of the role models that caused me to join the Foreign Service. I say horrified because he left the Foreign Service not too long after he finished his tour with the Peace Corps. He was finding it a very unsatisfactory experience, but nonetheless, I learned a number of things from him. I also met Keith Wauchope, who was the junior officer in the embassy at that time. And probably most important was that for the last year or a year and a half that I was around, Terence Todman was the ambassador in Chad. I was immensely impressed by him.

Q: So, your post was not that far away from the capital?

CHAVEAS: Well, yes, and no. As the crow flies, it was somewhat over a hundred kilometers, but there was no crow to fly. We had to go by road which involved a two-hundred-kilometer drive---for the first hundred of that, there was nothing that you would describe as a road. We went over the dunes, there were tracks left by earlier vehicles in the dunes that you had to go over, and that was the first hundred kilometers. Then there was a section that was vaguely graded mud, at least during the rainy season, which also was something to conquer. And then eventually, for the last fifty kilometers

there was a paved road. It got a little longer over the course of the two years because the French were building a paved road out that way, but this was no simple trip.

Q: Nevertheless, it was probably rewarding because the embassy could have a commissary or the guys---

CHAVEAS: Well, there was no commissary as I recall. And even if there was, we would not have had access to it as volunteers. There were French, mostly French-owned, stores in Fort Lamy. We would buy in great quantities each time that we went down because there wasn't too much opportunity to buy up in the small town we were in. But, you know, the trips to Fort-Lamy were an opportunity to unwind, to resupply and all. A visit to the big city!

Q: Well, now, you said you left Chad in March 1970, and you joined the Foreign Service shortly thereafter. When did you take the Foreign Service exam?

CHAVEAS: Well, before we leave the Peace Corps, let me mention one other thing. One of the reasons that I value my Peace Corps experience so much was, because in the Foreign Service, I think we all always have to recognize that we spend most of our time dealing with the elites in whatever country it is that we are assigned to. We tend to deal with the best educated people. We tend to deal with people who have power and influence. And try as most of us do to travel widely in our countries of assignment and see how people are actually living, just seeing it that way is not the same as having lived for a couple of years in an African village and having the experience of interacting with Africans at that level. And so, I went through my Foreign Service career with that particular experience always in my catalog of experiences, and that informed whatever kind of assessments I was making as I went through my career, about the places where I was then living and working.

But to the Foreign Service exam---a funny story here, I mentioned that Keith Wauchope was in the embassy in Chad when I was there, and one of his duties was to administer the Foreign Service exam every year. When I would run into Keith from time to time during my career, which I did with some frequency, if there was anybody else around, Keith would always say with some pride I guess, that he had administered the Foreign Service exam to Peter Chaveas.

Well, I never did anything to disabuse him of the fact that he hadn't. I took the written exam while I was a graduate student. I don't remember exactly where I took it but I imagined that it was somewhere in New Jersey. I then got an invitation to do the oral exam sometime during the second semester of that last year in graduate school. I went up to the U.S. Mission to the UN [United Nations] and took it there. At the end of the exam, they asked me to go into another room and wait a while. Shortly thereafter, they came out and told me that I had passed. I don't know if it is still the case but back then, if you were going into either the military or the Peace Corps, your place on the rank order list was simply retained and didn't move at all until you exited the Peace Corps or the military.

Q: Do you recall how that interview went? Some of the questions?

CHAVEAS: I remember that it was in a room with, there were three, rather, how would I describe them? Well, there were three suits up there. All my examiners were male, not surprisingly, in suits and ties. I was, of course, also in a suit and tie. I was placed at a separate table at some distance from them, with a pitcher of water and a glass and that was about it. And the questioning went on for quite a while. I think they questioned me for an hour or more and covered an awful lot of ground.

I don't remember a whole lot about specific questions, except, you know, this was 1968, the war in Vietnam was a critical issue. I don't know whether I raised the point, or they did, but anyway, I made it fairly clear that I didn't think our involvement in Vietnam made a whole lot of sense, which I know then led to some questions about, well, how do you think you could effectively represent the United States overseas? And I said something to the effect that I understood that my own opinions are my own opinions. When I am overseas, I speak for the U.S. government, and it is my role to explain our policy, whether I happen to agree with it or not.

I also remember that I was asked a question about if you were talking to a group of foreigners and had to recommend one book, just one book, that you would propose to them as a way of gaining some greater understanding of the United States. And I told them that I would recommend *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck. And then, they asked me of course to elaborate on that a bit. But anyway, I do distinctly remember that part of the questioning.

Q: Now, you joined the 92nd A-100 underclass in the spring of 1970. June, actually. You are coming out of the Peace Corps. You just got married. What did the other guys look like to you?

CHAVEAS: What did the other guys look like? Well, we were overwhelmingly male. There were some Vietnam vets in the group, which I found particularly interesting to interact with. The one I particularly remember is Ron Neumann. One of the unique things about our class was that in 1969, no one had been brought into the Foreign Service. No junior officer class happened in '69. Towards the end of that year, a group of folks on the rank order list group, were invited to come to training very early in 1970 provided that they agreed that their first assignment would likely be in the CORDS [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support] program in Vietnam.

A certain number of them agreed to that and signed up for that class. And then, not too long after that, the Department changed its policy and decided that no one coming in initially would be required to go into the CORDS program. They could volunteer to do so but that would not be a requirement of entering service. Well, that class before mine ended up being divided between guys who had signed on, on the condition that they go to CORDS, and half of them had declined to sign on. And so, I obviously wasn't in the room but I understand that that led to some interesting dynamics within the A-100 course over that particular period.

My class, no one was required to go to CORDS, and in fact, no one did, at least not as a first tour officer. One individual did volunteer to do it but the Department judged that he was not an appropriate candidate. I am trying to dredge up some other memories, I mean, I can remember some good social interaction. There were two Hispanic members of our class. I am afraid I don't remember them now but I got to know them fairly well. And when I injured my ankle severely a couple of weeks into the program and could no longer walk to FSI [Foreign Service Institute] and my wife didn't have a driver's license, one of them stepped up and picked me up every morning and got me back and forth to class.

I remember RAS Smith and his wife Cathy, with whom we spent a lot of time socializing. Andrew Winter. Andy Winter and I would find ourselves in the same posts or in the same bureau a number of times over our careers. He was the admin counselor in Pretoria while I was CG [consul general] in Johannesburg.

Q: Yeah, it was interesting at that time because some people, as you said, were coming out of the military. Some, very typically, are just coming out of graduate school or college. I recall in my class about this time, you could always tell the Peace Corps people out of Africa because they were still wearing the sandals that were made out of tires.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, actually, I am looking at the list now that you provided me and you know, there are other people on that list. I forget sometimes that they were in my junior officer class but people that I interacted with many times over the course of my career, Arlene Render, Joe Sullivan [Joseph Sullivan], Harry Geisel [Harold Geisel], Day Mount, and the two Hispanics that I referred to Ismael Lara, and Charlie Marquez [Charles Marquez, Joe Segars was there. Joe and I were in Lagos together along the way. Quite a few of them. Yeah, quite a few.

Q: Now, recall what kind of preferences people seemed to have in terms of future assignment?

CHAVEAS: Well, of course, back then, you didn't start out in a cone. That was something that you declared later, except for the admin and the USIA [United States Information Agency] officers. Lucille and I had decided that we would try the Foreign Service, first and foremost, because we decided that we really, really had a common love for Africa, and wanted to get back to it. At that time, it appeared to be the quickest ticket back. We, at that time, told ourselves we would do this for five years and then probably go on to something else. Thirty-four years later, retired from the Foreign Service and had spent a total of twenty years in Africa..

As I am sure you will recall back then, a week or so before the end of your A-100 course, you get a list of available assignments. And we got that list, and on it was, there were all kinds of Parises, Vienna and Tokyo, all kinds of places like that. There were only two assignments in Africa. One was Dakar. My wife has just spent two years in Senegal so that didn't jump at as. And the other was Abidjan, which also did not appeal. We've been

there a few times on vacation. It was a great place at that point to get away from Africa but not our idea of “real Africa”.

So, anyway, I turned in my list. As I recall, I had Beirut on it as my first choice, followed by Abidjan. But I complained about the list. I said, “I don't think much of this list, it doesn't match what I am looking for”. And then, on the day a week later, when we all finished the course, they had a little ceremony where they announced to all of us our respective assignments and they went through the list. And they came to Peter Chaveas and they said Freetown, Lucille and I looked at each other and cheered. A few of my colleagues at the little party afterwards came up to me and congratulated me on my Caribbean assignment! Even Foreign Service Officers didn't know that Freetown was in West Africa.

Fortunately, Lucille and I knew where it was. But anyway, it proved to be a godsend. When I later got to compare notes with some of my colleagues who went to places like Paris or Vienna, or whatever, and you know, we all in that time tended to go to first assignments as consular officers. And I went to Freetown as a consular officer. But the big difference was that consular work in Paris was a full-time job. So, they spent all of their time dealing with Americans in distress or visa applicants or whatever. While I was doing consular work, maybe a third of the time, and getting a great grounding in all kinds of other embassy work.

I was also designated as the embassy's econ/commercial officer. There was no formal designation there but that is what I became. I became the AID [United States Agency for International Development] residual affairs officer. There was no longer an AID mission in Freetown. There had been a pretty substantial one at one time. But there were still some odds and ends of activity around. And I took care of those, and a variety of other things. And so, I got this much broader look at what the Foreign Service was all about. And I just thought that that experience was invaluable.

Q: You arrived in Sierra Leone in December of '70, and what you are saying is, it sounds like a fairly small mission.

CHAVEAS: Oh, it was. It was very small. There were---well, I occupied a suite with the ambassador, the DCM [deputy chief of mission] and two secretaries. There was an admin officer. A two person, at that time, USIS [United States Information Service] office. I am trying to think, I think that was about it. There was a very, very robust Peace Corps volunteer program and their office was about a block away.

Q: What did your office building look like?

CHAVEAS: Well, it was a four or five-story building, something that the embassy rented. We didn't own it. It had an adjoining, fairly large space for the USIA library. And could not have been more central to the town. The center of the town, of Freetown, is a large cotton tree. The cotton tree has been documented to have been there when the first settlers, mostly freed slaves, came to Sierra Leone in the late 1700s. The embassy

building was right across the street from that cotton tree, and most of the rest of the city spiraled out from that center.

Q: As an ex-Peace Corps volunteer, what did your housing arrangement look like?

CHAVEAS: Paradise. We lived in an apartment block. There were only five apartments in the whole building. The top floor combined two apartments and was a penthouse for the DCM and his family. And then, there were four other apartments and we occupied one of those. We had an extraordinary view from our balcony looking out over the beaches and out into the Atlantic, and across the estuary of the Sierra Leone River. Compared to my hut in Bol, Chad, it was paradise.

Q: You said you worked in the same office as the ambassador.

CHAVEAS: I did.

Q: So, I think Robert Miner got there. What was he like to work with?

CHAVEAS: He could not have been kinder to me and Lucille. He and his wife Nettie were welcoming to us. He was a very approachable individual. And I learned a lot of lessons from him but two specific ones that I learned very, very early, one, before I even got to Freetown. I was going through training in Washington at FSI, particularly a good deal of more French training. I had emerged from the Peace Corps with a 2 in French and they wanted to get me up to a 3, so I could get off language probation right away. But this created a significant gap in Freetown.

The fellow that I replaced, George Trail, had already left in July or maybe August, I am not sure about that. And personnel in Washington started really pushing me to get out to post. And so, even though we had not been home for two consecutive Christmases, Lucille and I agreed to go out and to be at post by the 18th of December. Well, by luck for me, not for him, the ambassador was in Washington at this time because his wife was medevaced. And while he was there, I went in to see him for the first time. We had a great chat about Sierra Leone, about my background. And then at the end, he said, "Well, when can we expect to see you in Freetown?". And I smartly said, "December 18, sir". And his response was, "What the hell for? Nothing happens in Sierra Leone that time of year except parties".

So, we delayed our arrival by ten days, spent Christmas with our families and went out to post just before New Year's when there was a great party. The other lesson that I learned from him very early on was, maybe a week or two after I arrived, he took me to my first ever diplomatic reception. We drove up near the exit and got out to walk towards the building. We were about to go in and he grabbed me by the elbow and pulled me aside and said, "You are going to be spending a lot of time on these kinds of things over the course of your career. There are two rules you should always remember. First, when you walk in, survey the room and identify the nearest exit. Secondly, look around again and figure out who are the five or six people in the room who must know that you have been

there. Make sure they see that you have been there, and then go back to rule number one”.

Q: Love it.

CHAVEAS: Very helpful. That gives you an idea of the kind of person that he was.

Q: Let us start off, what were some of the interesting consular aspects of this tour?

CHAVEAS: Well, regrettably, one of the very first things I had to deal with was that, one weekend shortly after we arrived, I got a phone call to tell me that a Peace Corps volunteer had been killed several hours outside of Freetown. The Peace Corps took on most of the responsibility for dealing with that, for getting the body down to Freetown, for getting him into the mortuary and notifying his family, but there was a certain amount of paperwork that had to be done and I had to witness certain things that took place. And then, you know, a sobering experience to see that happen. It was an accidental death. He dove into a pool of water in a stream that was not as deep as he thought and broke his neck. So, obviously, one of the downsides of the work.

There was a certain number of lost passports, particularly by Peace Corps volunteers, or the odd visitor coming through Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone attracted a lot of the backpacker variety of travelers, and they would get into some minor problems, mostly dealing with lost documents. And then, there was a fair amount of student visa work. When I first got there, it was not too big a deal. Not too much volume. But there was a definite pickup in that volume over time, and it tended to involve a handful of schools in the United States heavily focused on things like secretarial skills. And frankly, Sierra Leone did not need that many secretaries. So, we started to have an awful lot of refusals.

In Sierra Leone, everybody knew a minister of government, and so, I started getting an awful lot of phone calls from members of the cabinet. In fact, the second ambassador that I served under, Clint Olson, observed only half-jokingly that I had more contact with the senior levels of the Sierra Leone government than he did. And actually, that was true for two reasons. I issued visas, and I also ran the embassy's Self-Help Program. I managed that program and a lot of ministers liked to have school rooms or whatever built in their various villages.

So, I was constantly dealing with that kind of pressure, explaining to ministers why this individual or that individual could not qualify for a visa, and also trying to explain to them without giving too much away how that individual might underline, might qualify for a visa. What more would they have to prove. One of the spin offs from that was that, rather late in my time there, we were requiring certain bank documents to prove that the individuals could in fact, or their sponsors, could in fact afford to support them in the United States. And one day, we had a particularly heavy load of applicants. And I am looking through the paperwork and I suddenly am looking at this bank document and thinking to myself, wait a second, I just saw the same bank document with a different name on it. And that was when we discovered that somebody in one of the local banks

was issuing bank account statements for a bribe, and simply putting different names on the same numbers. They were all fraudulent.

Q: Now, surely after you arrived, a number of political changes came to Freetown. I believe in March, 1971, Brigadier General Bangura launched a coup?

CHAVEAS: Yes. He did. It was one of the most un-secret events you can imagine. The town had been rife with rumors that this was going to happen for weeks before it did. But one of the things I remember, well, two things that I particularly remember about it is that Lucille and I had gone out to have lunch in a nearby bar restaurant with two Peace Corps volunteers who were staying with us at that time. And suddenly, about midway through our meal, a truckload of soldiers came roaring down the road right next to this place firing wildly into the air. No sense of where they were aiming. But basically, they were announcing the coup and getting people off the streets. So, after we got ourselves off the floor, we managed to get back to our car, and race back to the embassy. It was only two blocks away, pulled into the underground garage and stayed there for a while.

The coup was a very incompetent affair. The president's office was just a block above us, up a hill. We could see it clearly from our office. And the rebels set up their base right on the corner, outside the embassy. Our DCM Don Petterson went down a couple of times and told them that they really needed to move since they were drawing some fire in our direction. Don was the chargé at the time because the ambassador was out of the country briefly.

The coup was incompetent in that the president had been furnished with a very robust body guard by President Sékou Touré of Guinea, and all of these Guinean troops were lodged up in the president's office and held off the rebels very easily, even though there was an awful lot of firing going on from the rebels. And quite simply, the rebels ran out of ammunition. And although they knew where the ammunition was stored, they seemed incapable of getting that facility opened and the thing rather melted away because they lacked any ammunition. They just ran out. And so, the leaders were captured.

Freetown was in semi-lockdown for a long time and all of the Peace Corps volunteers were in lockdown. We made sure none of them came into Freetown during that period and as I mentioned before, we had two volunteers staying with us in our apartment. They were with us for several days until it was all clear for them to go back to their posts. But during that period, I recall very vividly, this apartment building of ours was up on the top of a prominent hill. We were up two stories additionally, and at one point, Guinean jets, MiGs, flew over the town and when they came past the apartment building, we and the pilot were at eye level with each other.

Q: The end result of all that was June 7, Sierra Leone became a republic, and Ambassador Miner presented his credentials to the new Head of State.

CHAVEAS: Right. He did. Prime Minister Siaka Stevens became the president of the country, replacing Queen Elizabeth as Head of State. Stevens was a former union leader.

He was not a very well-educated man. This was an early step towards Sierra Leone becoming both a one-party state and a kleptocracy. Stevens had many of the qualities of a thug. I remember that in the wake of the coup, the government was making all kinds of allegations through its controlled press about us having been the fomenters of that coup.

And the ambassador basically had to go up and tell them, cut it out. You are putting the lives of Americans at risk. In particular, you are putting the lives of Peace Corps volunteers at risk, because they are out in particularly vulnerable situations. So, basically, he just told them to cut it out. And we did not have any particular leverage at that time over the government of Sierra Leone, other than the fact that we were the United States, and he was the ambassador of the United States. And that proved to be adequate authority. So, they did cut it out, at least for that time. I mean, this would come back up from time to time.

Q: Now, surely after these events, Ambassador Miner leaves and Don Petterson becomes chargé. In fact, he was chargé for quite a period of time.

CHAVEAS: Oh yeah.

Q: Washington couldn't find another ambassador or?

CHAVEAS: No, a career officer was identified fairly early on to replace him. I am going to forget the name now, but that individual had been the head of personnel at a time when another officer, who had been selected out of the Foreign Service committed suicide. And some of the blame for that came back to personnel. I don't know if there really was any justification for that linkage, but nonetheless, that nomination failed and then there was a long period of searching for a different individual.

But if I could give you just one additional story about Ambassador Miner which I remember vividly and tells you a bit about the kind of person he was. He was very popular with the Peace Corps volunteers. We had a big program at that time, and they threw a party, a farewell party for him. And during that party, they presented to him, as well as to Don Petterson and to me, our own pairs of floral bell bottoms. And of course, the volunteers egged us on to go and put them on and come out and show off our finery. So, we all went into this one room and changed our pants and found out that the volunteers had some strange ideas about how large we were. So, it was a struggle to get those pants on but we all got them on and we came out and paraded appropriately for the volunteers.

Q: Between '71 and '72, what was happening, again on the political side of things, what was the intent by making Sierra Leone a republic?

CHAVEAS: Well, I think, the legacy of colonialism did not wear well in Sierra Leone. And in part, it didn't wear well because I mentioned briefly before that Sierra Leone as an eventual colony had, at first, been colonized by former slaves and also some Englishmen. That first try was not very successful, an awful lot of them died from tropical disease. But

there were subsequent tries and in time, Freetown was established. When the British declared slave trade illegal and ships found to be carrying slaves along the West African coast, those ships would be seized and brought in to Freetown by the Royal Navy. There would be trials, and the slaves who had been on those ships were freed. And so, there was this collection of former slaves who became what eventually was the Creole population of Freetown.

That Creole population came to be very advantaged by the British. They had just enough of a connection to Britain. They were given better education than anybody else in the country, and they came to dominate the professions and the civil service in Sierra Leone in its later days, both as a colony and then subsequently, as an independent country. But they were a minority of the population, a distinct minority. They didn't spread very far out of Freetown. There was a lot of resentment of their privileges amongst the majority of Sierra Leoneans and when the country was opened up to something resembling free and fair elections, the Creoles became a bit of a political target.

And I think that was behind some of the resentment of the Queen being the head of state. But more to the point, I think, there was just a general resentment of colonialism. Also, I wouldn't put aside the influence of Sékou Touré in Guinea. He, of course, had had a very contentious relationship with the French colonizers and he had a significant influence on Siaka Stevens.

Q: Now, Ambassador Olson arrives at post in mid-1972. What was he like to work with?

CHAVEAS: I found it a little difficult to tell you the truth. He frankly manifested from time to time some resentment of the breadth of the contacts that I had developed. I remember particularly, about six or seven months before we left, we moved quarters. We left the apartment building, and moved into an individual house a few miles away. And when we did that, we threw a huge housewarming party. On that invitation list were, you know, virtually everybody that we had gotten to know in the country over two years, and that included a number of ministers, some justices of the Supreme Court, and the French ambassador among other diplomats. I remember getting feedback through the DCM, Bob Houdek [Robert Houdek] that the ambassador didn't particularly like the idea that I was socializing in that way with this range of people. The French Ambassador seemed to be a particular sore point.

I remember a particular case where I turned down a visa applicant. The following day, I was told that the ambassador wanted to see me in his office right away. So, I go into his office and there sitting on his couch, this visa applicant and some prominent Sierra Leonean. I don't remember who it was but some prominent Sierra Leonean who was a relative of this individual. The Ambassador instructed me to explain how this woman would go about fulfilling the visa requirements. And that was obviously not helpful in my ability to adjudicate future cases because everybody had a relative of some prominence in that town.

Q: Now, in a place like this, what would an embassy Fourth of July party look like?

CHAVEAS: The fourth of July falls in the middle of the rainy season in West Africa and the rainy season in Freetown was quite something, torrential. Therefore our national day celebration was more frequently held in February, on Washington's birthday.

And so, there would be a large reception, a very large invitation list including a who's who of local VIPs, business leaders, often expatriates, diplomatic colleagues and many American citizens. A very large collection of people gathered outside at the ambassador's residence. There would be a formal receiving line for a period of time and then people would just break up, have drinks, have a good party. There was always plenty of food as I recall, and inevitably, a speech by the ambassador and usually a response by somebody from the government. I suspect that most formal Fourth of July parties around the world are very similar.

Q: Now, you mentioned that you were familiar with the French ambassador. What did the diplomatic community in Freetown look like?

CHAVEAS: Well, there was a very substantial British presence. One of the people I got to know in the High Commission very early on was their DCM, who was another diplomat who was particularly kind to me. You know, I was below his rank, but he included us in a lot of their social functions, and Lucille and I really benefited from that.

The French had a very, very small presence. I think there were three French employees. There were a number of Africans, the Nigerians were a significant presence. In fact, they occupied the building right next to ours. And the UN [United Nations] had a pretty big presence there, the UN Development Program in Sierra Leone was pretty substantial. I'm trying to recall any others that particularly stood out. I think the Germans had a presence, but I am not sure of that. I know they didn't when I went back. The Taiwan Chinese had a mission until Sierra Leone recognized the PRC and then there was a substantial Communist Chinese presence.

Q: You mentioned going to a restaurant with your Peace Corps house guests. What was the entertaining scene like?

CHAVEAS: There were a number of really nice restaurants around town, more often than not run by Lebanese. There was a significant Lebanese community in Sierra Leone, in business, particularly in diamonds, which of course was the major export of the country. And so, there were some really good restaurants to go to. They would not do too well in Paris, but they did quite well in Freetown. At that time, the beaches of Freetown and all along the peninsula that Freetown occupies, were some of the most beautiful in the world. And the coast of Sierra Leone is unique in West Africa because there is a rather wide continental shelf at that point. So, it was quite safe to swim in those waters, which was very different if you only went as far as Monrovia or up the coast of Senegal where the continental shelf is very narrow, and therefore you get a lot of very rugged tides coming in close to the shore.

The Sierra Leoneans took advantage of that, to some extent. There was a budding tourism industry developing in the latter part of my tour, and a couple of new hotels went up. That added to the socializing. And then there were a lot of parties in people's houses. We threw quite a few of them in our apartment. I think everybody enjoyed themselves very much.

Q: When you were doing the Foreign Service interview, you had this question about the Vietnam War. By '73, you have the ceasefire in Vietnam. Did those kinds of external events come into your conversations with your diplomatic colleagues? Or was that a world away?

CHAVEAS: It was a world away. There were a couple of mudslinging newspapers in town which loved to run stories, true or not, about Vietnam which agitated the scene a little bit. But by and large, I hardly ever had anybody raise Vietnam with me, except perhaps some of the Peace Corps volunteers. I felt freer to express my own personal opinions with them.

Q: Now, how did your next assignment come about?

CHAVEAS: Well, before we leave Sierra Leone, I think I ought to mention---I had mentioned early on that I became the econ commercial officer at the post as well. And I did some reporting on various subjects, and it was my first lesson in the fact that sometimes, people in Washington pay attention. Because one of the things that I was required to do, we used to have a required list of econ reports that we had to submit every year. One of them was an annual evaluation of the UNDP's [United Nations Development Program] program.

In my first year there, I sent in a scathing report about the UNDP. They had a total lack of priorities. It was whatever the Sierra Leone government had expressed an interest on any given day. The leader of the UNDP at that time was not someone who was at all inclined to push back against anything that the Sierra Leone government said. And so, I reported it as such, and Washington came back and said, "We are taking this to New York and we are going to see about the need for some changes out there". And indeed, that Rep was replaced shortly after that, or some other people were. I am foggy on that one. But anyway, it did result in some impact.

Also, I wrote a report on the government's relations with the World Bank. (I may be confusing the World Bank and the IMF here. It has been a long time.) The government at that time was working under an agreement with the Bank, which limited their ability to enter into any kind of new loan agreement outside of the World Bank context. Through a very valuable contact in the Central Bank, I learned that while the government was strictly speaking, adhering to that agreement, it was soon to expire. And the government had already lined up a whole list of new loans that would just blow out the intent of the whole agreement. Completely undo everything that had been agreed to, the spirit of everything that had been agreed to, through those constraints. Well, Washington read this, they talked to the World Bank about it. And not too long afterwards, there was a delegation from the World Bank who came to town. They wanted to talk to us and others

about what we had reported. And they pushed back against my report saying “Well, we can't consider political acts. We can't consider the political context here. We have to go by the numbers, and the numbers say that they have adhered to their agreement”.

And if I remember correctly, that was in fact World Bank doctrine at that time. That the politics was not their business. I do not want to draw a straight line at all but it wasn't too long after that---and we are counting in years now---that the World Bank changed that approach. And there were many other examples besides the one in Sierra Leone that they had to address. But they came to understand that they couldn't just look at the economic statistics, they had to look at the larger political context in which things were happening.

And then finally, I got my first really stark lesson in how business is done in West Africa. The embassy had been working for some time with a representative of an American fishing company, and I was doing most of that leg work. This fellow was proposing an investment in Sierra Leone to operate a portion of their fleet out of Freetown, to have certain fishing rights off of Sierra Leone, and to develop a training program in country for Sierra Leoneans to develop the appropriate skills to do that particular kind of fishing. We thought we were making real progress on it. We had moved it past a whole string of senior government officials, permanent secretaries in different ministries that had to be involved.

But then finally, one time, Rudy Aggrey [Rudolph Aggrey], who was at that time the Director for West Africa, was on a visit. I was assigned as his control officer. Well, one evening, I got a call from the local hotel to tell me that Steve Tubman would like to invite me and Mr. Aggrey to come up and have a drink with him. Steve Tubman was the brother of the then president of Liberia. He owned the largest fishing company in West Africa--- I don't believe he was the Minister of Finance at that time, but he would also somewhere along the line, be the Minister of Finance of Liberia. He had invited us up for a drink, essentially to mock us.

He explained to us that, “You've been very foolish thinking that you can sign this agreement with the government of Sierra Leone. It doesn't matter what the permanent secretary of development or finance or whatever says about your project. I have a personal agreement with President Siaka Stevens, and I pay him personally for the rights to fish off of Sierra Leone. And you are not going to replace me in those waters”. That was the end of the deal.

But it was my first really hard indication of the kind of government that Siaka Stevens was developing at that time. And it got much worse over the years, and it was certainly a central reason for the eventual widespread violence that would engulf the country. I, at that point, certainly would not have predicted the violence but I certainly saw the handwriting on the wall that this, what should have been a fairly prosperous little African country was not going to even come close to that.

Q: And your next assignment comes up?

CHAVEAS: I'm just noticing it is almost three o'clock.

Q: Yeah, I wanted to get into that and then we'll break off.

CHAVEAS: Okay, well, I actually have to leave in five minutes.

Q: Okay, well, then let's break here and let me---

Q: You were previously in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

CHAVEAS: Right.

Q: A modest African country. How did you get this assignment to Nigeria?

CHAVEAS: Well, I was getting towards the end of my assignment in Freetown and I had an onward assignment to be a watch officer back in the Department. But I went back to Washington for a conference, I want to say something like March of that year (1973), and I ended up having lunch with George Trail who was about to go out to Kaduna as the principal officer, and with Rudy Aggrey, who was at that time the director of A/FW [Office of West African Affairs]. They sold me on this idea of going to Nigeria, and I was able to change the assignments.

And then I flew back to Freetown. My wife picked me up after I got off the ferry from the airport and we were driving back to the house and she said, "Well, when are we going back to Washington?". Because we had not fixed dates at that point. And I said, "Well, I'd like to talk to you about that". So anyway, we went off to Nigeria, and for me, the real attraction was to get in some way involved in one of the most fascinating countries on the continent. As it ended up, Nigeria became the focus of more of my time in the Foreign Service than any other single country.

Q: Well, actually, Nigeria is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa.

CHAVEAS: Oh yeah, it is. Yeah, yeah.

Q: By population and size of its economy. So, along those lines the consulate in Kaduna where you were assigned. It is not that far from Abidjan, the capital, so, why was there a consulate there?

CHAVEAS: No, no, you are thinking of Abuja.

Q: Abuja, sorry.

CHAVEAS: Abuja, the capital city, didn't exist at that time. The capital was in Lagos, I can't remember exactly when the Nigerians decided to move their capital to a more central location. By the time I went back in the '80s, the new capital was under

construction. But at that time, Abuja was a little tiny village renowned mostly for its pottery but certainly not for its population or anything beyond that. Kaduna was of importance because it was in a very real sense, the capital of northern Nigeria. The Hausa-Fulani country of Nigeria, which is one of the biggest ethnic groups in the country and really quite important in that regard.

Q: The time you got there, the Biafra thing was over. Isn't that right?

CHAVEAS: *Biafra*, yeah. *Biafra* had ended in the early '70s.

Q: And were there any leftover political problems or issues?

CHAVEAS: Well, there remained a fair amount of resentment amongst *Igbos*. But the war had driven an awful lot of the *Igbos* out of the north. So, as a result, our contact with them was limited. There were still some around. They were particularly valued as mechanics. They were some of the best mechanics that you could find in the north, but they weren't very numerous at that point. So, we didn't, from our vantage point, we didn't get a whole lot of sense of that particular issue anymore.

Q: Now, Kaduna itself has about four or five officers?

CHAVEAS: Yeah, it was a very small shop. Kaduna was a much, much smaller town back then than it is today. But it was a particularly interesting time while I was there because of the oil embargo. In '73, oil prices just shot through the roof. Nigeria had been an oil producer for some time before that, but suddenly their oil became so much more valuable. And their income from it was just enormous in terms of their past experience. And so, the issue became how to use that money constructively and how to avoid the corruption that inevitably followed behind it.

During that period, I believe it was in '74, Yakubu Gowon, who was at that time the head of state, made a speech in northern Nigeria, at the dedication of the new university in Sokoto. And he said during that speech that Nigeria's greatest national problem was how to spend money. And I would argue that there is no country in the world that has solved its greatest national problem so quickly. They spent like crazy, an enormous amount of it was wasted or stolen, frankly. An awful lot of buildings were built with not much to put in them. And of course, the corruption accelerated. It would be far, far worse by the time I came back to Nigeria in the '80s. But nonetheless, it really took off during that period.

But the other side of that was that I was in Kaduna, primarily to be the commercial officer. And suddenly, a lot of entities in northern Nigeria were interested in spending their money on some American goods. We hosted some trade missions over that period which had some traction, I wouldn't want to exaggerate that. And we got a couple of efforts at American investment in the north. The most memorable one was that the oil companies, American oil companies who operated down in the east and offshore, would bring in most of their workers from the United States, fly them in and take them right to their jobs in the east.

And they had to feed these people. So, they had found a banker and cattlemen from, I believe it was Oklahoma, who they tried to interest in opening a large feedlot up in northern Nigeria. And he came up and did quite a bit of travel around the north. I went with him on a good part of it. But his final test was that he himself purchased a small herd of cattle, and then sought to resell it into the major cattle processing facilities up in Kano. Not because he was looking to make any money off these particular transactions, but that he wanted to see how it worked. And what he discovered was that it was such a closed activity. The people who participated in it knew each other, were very happy to be operating with each other and were very intent on keeping outsiders out of it. So, that project did not go forward.

Q: What other things might you be reporting on as the economic officer?

CHAVEAS: Well, I did an awful lot, you know, as I said, there was a lot of money floating around. Suddenly, state governments had a lot of money to use and I did a fair amount of reporting on their budgets. And also, on the degree to which they were or were not adhering to those budgets.

Q: Now you were talking about going around the north with the American cattle guy. I think it has been, there was a lot of travel involved in your portfolio.

CHAVEAS: Oh, yeah. Well, it is geographically a big space, the north, the part of the country where we had responsibility. And yes, there was a lot of travel, most of it by road. Occasionally by air, but mostly by road.

Q: Well developed with the road system at that time?

CHAVEAS: It wasn't too bad, and it was getting better because of the money. A lot of roads were being built. These were not what we would call inter-states by any stretch of the imagination, but they built some good, solid, rural type roads, at least between the major population centers. An issue that started to crop up while I was there, however, was gasoline shortages. With the prosperity of all this money came a heck of a lot more vehicles, and Nigeria did not have a very good distribution network. And it didn't have much refinery capacity of its own. At that time, none of that was in the north. That came along fairly shortly afterwards.

But anyway, it meant that there were constant shortages of gasoline. And I remember an experience where I learned that our car which had been shipped from Freetown had arrived in Lagos. Rather than wait for the monthly truck up from Lagos which didn't always have room to bring vehicles along, I flew down to Lagos myself and drove back. In the course of doing that, I picked up a couple of hitchhikers. A couple of guys just out of Lagos were going to Kaduna as I was, and as we were driving along, we kept running across these gasoline tankers that were burned out hulks. And I am asking these guys what is all this about? I mean, the occasional accident you could see but they were all over the place.

Well, the story was, as they related it to me, was that the lorry drivers, rather than drive them to their destination, they would stop at various informal gas stations along the road and sell this guy ten gallons and that guy twenty gallons, and so on and so forth, until their load was getting pretty darn light. And then they would amazingly have an accident and fire! That only exacerbated the problem that was created by the multiplication of vehicles that were being brought into the country because of the flow of money around the economy.

Q: You mentioned flying down to Lagos, was there a good Nigerian air transportation system?

CHAVEAS: It was developing. I can't say that it really was excellent by any means. There was pretty much a monopoly. Eventually that changed but yeah, Nigerian Airways was pretty much it. You could not count on a reservation really being a reservation, so you had to do some maneuvering to actually get on the plane that you thought you were getting on.

Q: Did the embassy have its own aircraft?

CHAVEAS: No, no. It did not.

Q: Now, one of the other guys with you in Kaduna was the PAO [public affairs officer]. What were his programs like?

CHAVEAS: You know, I wish I could tell you. I know he ran a library. They were located at the consulate, it was very popular, I know that. But programs beyond that, I don't want to suggest he didn't have any, but my memory is failing me on that.

Q: Well, you were saying, you were describing the consulate---give us a fuller description of the work offices, the consulate itself.

CHAVEAS: The consulate itself was by far the most dismal U.S. government building I have ever worked in. I walked in the first day and I walked through the lobby into the executive suite if you will, which I shared with the principal officer and a secretary. And my first thought was, "My gosh, there are no windows in this place". There was no window in my office or actually it was boarded up. The reason for that was that if I'd had an open window there, I would have provided entertainment all day for the people that were visiting the city market, which was immediately outside the building.

So, that was boarded up. The same thing in the principal officer's office. However, there were in fact two windows in the area where the secretary sat but they were so dirty that I initially thought there were no windows there at all. Just incredibly filthy. George Trail's predecessor did not want to hear the word administration, he was totally uninterested in the subject. And so, that area of the consulate was much neglected.

Q: I assume there was air conditioning and that.

CHAVEAS: Yes, there was, but there wasn't very reliable electricity in the city. And although we did have a generator, that hadn't been very well maintained either. And so, it worked some of the time.

Q: Now, was this a standalone building?

CHAVEAS: No, no. We rented space from a Nigerian government entity.

Q: And what were your living arrangements like?

CHAVEAS: Living accommodations, we had a nice house. It was a one story three-bedroom arrangement. There was adequate space for entertaining which we did a lot of, although interestingly enough, when we first arrived there and had our first dinner party, we realized that we did not have enough chairs to seat all of the guests. In addition, we discovered that unless you sat on the sofa in our living room in exactly the right place, you would fall right through it. Fortunately, not too long after that, a shipment of new furniture for the principal officers' house arrived and we got the furniture that had been in his house.

Q: Sounds like the admin officer had quite a chore.

CHAVEAS: Yes, not always done.

Q: Did you get a chance to get down to the embassy from time to time?

CHAVEAS: I did, from time to time. I was probably down there twice a year but our communications with the embassy, frankly, were not very good. Partly, that was a technical problem. The phones certainly didn't work. And of course, this was a different age in terms of the USG's [United States government] technical capabilities for communications. But also, to be quite frank, we were out of sight and out of mind. The embassy didn't pay very much attention to us. Both George Trail and I worked on that subject pretty hard, kept inviting people up to see the north and had some success in that regard. But also, we found it useful at times to exploit the very, very poor telephone conversations between the two posts.

Because occasionally, we would get a phone call that we knew we didn't really want to get. And so, we would get about two sentences into the conversation and suddenly, we would start screaming, "Are you there? Are you there? I can't hear you. Sorry, I'm going to have to cut this off. We can't hear you". We did that a few times here and there. But I should also emphasize this out of sight, out of mind thing. There was an inspection of the mission while I was posted there. And the inspectors were in country for at least a month, because it is a big operation. I mean, there were two constituent posts at that time, plus a USIS branch up in Kano. But the only time that the embassy could conceive of sending

the inspectors up to look at Kaduna was over the four-day Easter holiday. So, any of us who had any plans for that little bit of time off had to ditch them.

Q: What did the inspector say about Kaduna?

CHAVEAS: As I recall, I think we got pretty good grades, but I don't remember that in much detail.

Q: So, neither the ambassador or the DCM made an effort to come up?

CHAVEAS: You know, my memory may be fuzzy on this but I don't remember either John Reinhardt or DCM Crosby [Oliver Crosby] ever coming up. I could be wrong on that. Don Easum, when he came along to be ambassador, he did come up, yes.

Q: Who, in a post like that, who would be some of your main contacts?

CHAVEAS: Well, a lot of government officials. And, you know, we had all the state government officials, plus there was still at that time, a regional body. There was a fairly sizable British business community in the north. And we kept in touch with them an awful lot. I can remember particularly a couple of bankers that I knew pretty well, both in Kaduna and Kano. We were in touch with a number of religious figures. Kaduna was kind of on the line that divided Nigeria between Muslims and Christians. And so, there was leadership from both of those communities to keep in close touch with.

And then, over in Plateau State, which is just to the east of Kaduna, there was an enormous concentration of American missionaries. And we kept in close contact with them, both because they were American citizens and there was an American school over there and the principal officers, at least one of his children, attended school over there. But also, amongst the missionaries were some people who had been around for a very long time, and whom I found valuable. They really got to know local languages. They were well informed about the areas in which they lived.

Q: What did the major ethnic groupings look like, up there in the north?

CHAVEAS: Well, there is the ethnic Fulani-Hausa majority in that area. They are one of the three largest ethnic groups in the entire country. But there is also an area called the Middle Belt. This was a geographic area that kind of stretched quite literally across the middle of Nigeria and spread into the Benue and Plateau areas to the east and beyond. There were all kinds of small groups in that area. I have heard estimates of as high as two hundred and fifty distinct groups that lived in that particular part of the country.

Q: I was reading somewhere that the north was dominated by the Nigerian military? Or it had most of its bases up in that area?

CHAVEAS: Well, at that time, Hausa officers predominated in the upper ranks of the military, yes. Where there were technical skills involved, say logisticians or communicators or skilled folks like that, that tended to be people from further south.

Q: You were there starting in '73 through '75?

CHAVEAS: Yeah.

Q: How did you organize in your next assignment?

CHAVEAS: Well, I extended for an extra six months in Kaduna, precisely so I could get into the six month econ-commercial course starting in January of the following year. And then, when I finished the six-month econ course, I would be back in the summer cycle. So, that's what governed the timing there.

Q: The economic commercial course seemed of interest to you. I mean, you were the economic commercial officer in Kaduna, but that is not the same as being in an embassy. Why did you pick that?

CHAVEAS: Well, it kind of dated back to when I was in Freetown. I just found some of the economic issues particularly interesting there and given what was happening in Nigeria, they were even more interesting as they tried to spend all this money. And I had not taken a lot of economics in my undergraduate and graduate years, so, I thought, good opportunity to expand my knowledge in that area.

Q: Can you describe that economic commercial course you took? Because it is a fairly serious mid-level introduction.

CHAVEAS: Well, I should say before we leave Kaduna, our first child was born there. She had been conceived in Sierra Leone but Lucille delivered while we were in Nigeria. Pamela was born at a Catholic Missions hospital just outside of Kaduna. That was more of an adventure than anybody reading these pages would be interested in, but we always refer to her as our African American. And when we went back to the States eventually and she would go outside, playing with her friends in our neighborhood, one of her ways of lording it over her playmates was to say, "Well, when I was a baby in Africa", and go on from there. She was only two when we left Kaduna, so she didn't really remember any of it.

But onto the econ-commercial course, probably the most intense educational experience I have ever had. I don't know what your memories of it may be but holy smokes, to cram all of that into six months was really, really something else. I spent a lot of late nights at home, pounding on those books. I guess the things that I remember most out of that course were two of our teachers, John Harrington and Bruce Duncan, two of the best teachers I have ever had anywhere. Just, just absolutely, astoundingly good at what they did.

Q: Can you describe how this was put together? I mean, what subjects were covered and what kind of timeframe?

CHAVEAS: Well, as I said, it was six months, and it was recognized by the major universities in and around Washington as the equivalent of a BA [Bachelor of Arts], plus twelve hours of graduate work. And so, it covered the gamut of, you know, what you would do in an economics major during that period. And it had its own staff, two of whom I just mentioned, but it also drew on professors from several of those area universities. I remember most particularly the guy who taught us banking and finance, who was from George Washington University. He was an outstanding teacher, and by luck many years later when I was in Lyon, he was a USIS speaker touring around Europe. I managed to steer him towards Lyon and we had some great sessions with him there as well.

Q: What did you think of some of the other students in the class?

CHAVEAS: Well, aside from present company, I guess the other one that stood out to me and I remember best, was John Wolf who went on to some great things in his career down the way. John and I used to have some pretty good debates over subjects that we disagreed on, but I just thought he was a very, very impressive guy and I was glad to be part of that activity with him. I'm looking at the list here right now trying to remember some others.

George Mitchell. George and I shared some Nigeria experience and would continue to do so in the future. I kind of lost track of George, maybe within ten years after that course but a very first-rate guy. I really thought highly of George.

Q: Now, you get a desk job?

CHAVEAS: Yeah. Well, yeah.

Q: Was that set up before you went into the course?

CHAVEAS: No. I didn't go directly from that to the Nigeria desk. I had an intervening year. I went to the IO [Bureau of International Organization Affairs] for a year, to the Office of International Economic Policy. And quite frankly, I was sold a bill of goods by this office and it almost led to me leaving the Foreign Service.

Q: We are about to get cut off, so, let's do this thing where we literally sign up again.

CHAVEAS: Gotcha.

Q: I've got less than a minute, it says.

CHAVEAS: I was approached by the deputy director of this office. And I believe he had done so because one of the deputy assistant secretaries in the office in IO at that time, was a former professor of mine at Denison University. And what I was told was that the International Organization Bureau was tired of being marginalized in key economic policy decision making in the Department. And that they wanted to develop this particular office as a kind of a think tank for the International Organizations Bureau to address that concern, and I gave it some thought, talked to some people, and had some other possibilities.

But I decided to go with this, it sounded kind of interesting to me. Well, I got into the job and it became pretty quickly obvious that no one had chosen to consult the director of the office on this particular issue. I thought his deputy was speaking for him. But the director was not at all on board, he wanted the office to stick to its traditional function which in my case was, amongst other things to be, essentially the desk officer for a couple of the UN's regional activities, for their Center for East Asia, and also for the organization that focused on Latin America, the Economic Commission for Latin America [and the Caribbean].

I tried to be a good desk officer for these organizations, but I found that generally, I was the only one showing any interest in them at all. It was like pulling teeth to get other people to provide input. And so, I spent about six months trying to make a job out of this, a challenging job out of it. and then concluded that either, it was time to leave the service or to find some other position. Fortunately, not too long after that, I had lunch with Bob Houdek, who was at that time the deputy director in AF/W. He said next summer, we are going to be having this opening in AF/W for an officer in charge of Nigeria. Back at that time, the desk was a three-officer operation, and they needed somebody to be the senior officer. And I grabbed on to that opportunity right away. Persevered in the IO job for the balance of a year but then moved on to the Nigeria job.

Q: Now, isn't that interesting? I mean, Nigeria as we know is the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa. Has all this oil and there were only three people in AF/W?

CHAVEAS: No, on the Nigeria desk within the AF/W.

Q: Oh, okay.

CHAVEAS: Actually, even that was a downgrading. A year or two before I took on the job, Nigeria had been its own independent office within AF. It was AF/NI. But that had changed, it had been integrated into AF/W. It had been an independent office more than anything else to address the issues surrounding the *Biafran War*. But that was pretty much behind us by then.

Q: From the Washington perspective then, what were some of the main issues dealing with Nigeria?

CHAVEAS: Well, as had been the case when I was in Kaduna, it was the fact that number one, they were a major oil supplier. A major oil supplier to the United States, in fact, and that they had an awful lot of financial resources. But also, that they were making a serious effort to move away from military rule to civilian rule, and that they were looking very much at the U.S. Constitution as a model for their democracy.

And all of that generated all kinds of hope about this African giant looking to become democratic on our model, and also having a lot of resources to put behind that. And the Nigerians had for some time already been significant regional diplomatic players. So, for instance, anytime that we tried to pursue some kind of initiative with respect to South Africa, the Nigerians were in the middle of that. And we made a point of making sure that they were in the middle of it.

Q: Along the road of developing democracy, didn't the Nigerian President Obasanjo come to the United States?

CHAVEAS: Well, yes. I had hardly been able to warm my seat when it was announced that Jimmy Carter would become the first sitting American president ever to visit Africa. And he was going solely to Nigeria, which greatly upset the Liberian community in the United States, but anyway we began the preparations for that. But also, it was announced shortly after that that there would be a reciprocal visit, a state visit by President Obasanjo. And back in those days, I don't think this is the case anymore, but back in those days, there were all kinds of requirements for the Department---meaning the desk---to produce various kinds of briefing materials for the President, draft speeches, scenarios, etc.

So, we became absolutely obsessed with producing all of that material. Again, I had hardly been in the office at that time. It was a lot of work until it was announced that Carter was postponing his visit until the following year because of the oil crisis, and the efforts of the administration to address that. Nonetheless, both visits took place. The Obasanjo visit to Washington ended up coming first, and then Carter went to Nigeria the following year, and so, a lot of what we had written was still relevant and could be updated. And also because of political pressure domestically by the Liberian community, he also made a very brief stop in Liberia.

Q: I was noticing that George Trail, who was in Kaduna, is the deputy director in AF/W by this time.

CHAVEAS: Yes, he was. And I've known, I still know George quite well (He passed away quite recently). We are good friends and I have always enjoyed working with him. However, because of Nigeria's profile, the office director, Tom Smith [Thomas W.M. Smith], took a particular interest in Nigeria. And point in fact, I worked much more closely with Tom than I did with George. And over the two years I had some outstanding colleagues on the desk, Sue Ford Patrick, Bob Kott, Helen Weinland and Lou McCall.

Q: Given the oil crisis and Nigeria's position, were there many trips up to the Hill to brief the Congress?

CHAVEAS: Yeah. You know, Nigeria was a valued source of petroleum. They didn't cut us off, they didn't participate in the boycott. And so, they were particularly valued for that. But to the extent that I remember, various discussions with the Congress or staffers, their primary interest seemed to be more in this transition to democracy and what it meant both for the largest country in Africa, but also as an example to others. And so, that generated a lot of congressional attention. It also generated an enormous amount of interest in the press. I was getting phone calls constantly from the press about what was going on in Nigeria.

Q: So, you are probably having to prepare the morning press release for the spokesman.

CHAVEAS: We did a fair amount of that. Yeah, yeah.

Q: Now, by 1979, you have a whole series of external events, primarily the Middle East---that is the U.S. Embassy being seized in Tehran. Did those kinds of events impact on a daily basis on a country desk that is important but not related?

CHAVEAS: Our Embassy in Tehran was seized in November of '79. I had left the desk by then. An issue that I do remember consuming a great deal of our time was Nigeria's growing reputation for being the source of all kinds of scams. Various Nigerians claiming to be Nigerian princes will help you get a fortune out of Nigeria, if only you would pay them a small fee up front.

This is something that we really started to become aware of while I was on the desk. We started fielding a lot of phone calls from people about these scams, and quickly realized that we couldn't field that many phone calls. So, we put together a brochure. I mean, this is before the days of the internet and the web being readily available. And so, we had brochures that we would send out to folks to tell them as best we could what was really going on. One of the things that I remember most distinctly was that most of these scams in some way or another would make it fairly clear that the money that the scammer was offering to cut you in on, was ill gotten gains. And you would not believe the number of victims, particularly Midwestern churches, who knowing this nonetheless had fallen for or chose to participate in these scams. It was quite striking. I don't know how to explain that.

Q: On your time on the desk, where are you also working with other embassies in Washington?

CHAVEAS: We kept in touch particularly with the British, as I had when I was in Kaduna. Some of our chief contacts were people in the British High Commission.

Q: Did the High Commission have an office in Kaduna?

CHAVEAS: Yes, yeah.

Q: Oh. So, there was a diplomatic community in Kaduna.

CHAVEAS: It was very small. I think we were maybe five or six at most. But yeah, there was a small community,

Q: And you and the British, and who else? The French?

CHAVEAS: I know the Germans did. The Lebanese I think, the Egyptians, and possibly the French. I am not sure on that point.

Q: In Kaduna.

CHAVEAS: Yes. And the British also had their equivalent of our USIS.

Q: Now, in '79 I guess it is, you took a mid-career back to school on economics. How did you get away with that since you have just taken the econ course?

CHAVEAS: Well, it was actually an offshoot of the course. I had done well enough in the course that they reached out to me and said, "Have you considered the opportunity or the possibility of going and studying, at a graduate level, more economics?" And I jumped at that. I must say, I had at least one personnel adviser who told me, "Oh, bad idea, bad idea". I can't remember who he was, but this is just going to be a blank in your career". But I persisted and I went off to Princeton for a year, to what was then the Woodrow Wilson School.

And again, it was a very, very demanding year. First of all, I had never had any math whatsoever beyond high school, except perhaps some statistics. And by the time I went to Princeton, economists only spoke calculus. So, they had a calculus bootcamp for two weeks before the actual school sessions began for a variety of us, including a number of us who were from other parts of the U.S. government. There were a few other State officers involved as well. And we learned, at least, the basics of calculus so we could have some comprehension of what was going on. I eventually, in the second semester, wrote a paper for a seminar that I took which depended heavily on calculus. And if I pulled that out today, I couldn't possibly read it.

Q: Now, would your family have gone up with you to---

CHAVEAS: Yeah, yeah. All four of us went up there.

Q: How did they arrange that? I mean, were you on a per diem?

CHAVEAS: You had the option. You could either take it as a transfer, with everything that went along with that. Or you could opt for a per diem situation and my calculations told me that the per diem was the preferable way to go. And so, we made our own moving arrangements and moved in up there. Our housing was provided. We were in graduate/junior faculty housing.

Q: Out of that experience, you said there were other foreign service government people. Have you kept in touch with them?

CHAVEAS: Unfortunately, no. I stayed in touch with Vern Penner [Vernon Penner Jr.] for quite a few years. Vern eventually became ambassador to Cape Verde and I must say, I lost track of him after that. And you know, various of them I kept in touch with for significant periods of time but have not been in touch lately.

Q: Alright, your next assignment then was the embassy in Niger.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: Landlocked. How did that opportunity come up?

CHAVEAS: I wanted to be a DCM [deputy chief of mission], and I wanted to go back to Africa. And two ambassadors, Jim Bishop [James Bishop Jr.], in Niger, and Tom Boyatt [Thomas Boyatt] in Ouagadougou expressed interest in having me go, and I opted for Niger. It was probably the most foreign place that I have ever served. Niger is, as you say, landlocked, cut off from a lot of outside influences. And while it was a French colony for decades, the French influence was really just a veneer. And so, it was much more African in the way that the things functioned although the French, in particular, remained a very significant presence.

Q: Actually, what did the diplomatic community look like?

CHAVEAS: Well, we had---the French were by far the largest. There were Germans. There were a couple of Middle Eastern countries there. The Libyans were building probably the largest embassy, certainly in Niamey, but one of the largest I had ever seen in West Africa. An enormous building but it was sitting empty. There was constant contention between the Libyans and the government of Niger. Mostly because Gaddafi kept claiming that parts of northern Niger, particularly those parts that tended to produce uranium, which was Niger's most important export, was---kept claiming it as part of traditional Libya.

And one of the things that we were particularly involved with was in providing some military training and equipment to the Nigeriens, not because we ever thought that they could defeat an actual onslaught by the Libyans. That just wasn't on, but they had a quite disciplined military. Their head of state was a general and they were quite capable within the limits of their size and resources. And so, we tried to provide them with some relevant training, and as I said, a little bit of equipment. And, just gave as many signals as we could, without becoming directly involved, that we were quite interested in the territorial integrity of Niger.

Q: As you are looking at a map, Niamey is on the far west part of Niger, and Libya touches the far east part, kind of a long, thin country. Why was the capital where it was?

CHAVEAS: The overwhelming majority of the population was in a very narrow belt along the southern border. The *Zarma* people, the tribe that was the largest part of the population, dominated the government and the military. Niger, like so many other African countries, is geographically one of these totally artificial creations of the colonial administrators. It makes no sense in terms of the history of the peoples that lived there. But that is what it is. And one of the points of tension in that country, a very important one, was that there were these people along the south who dominated the government, and then there were the nomadic or semi- nomadic people, the *Tuaregs*, who were dominant in the northern part.

But the north was very sparsely populated. They were not a big piece of the total population and the government in Niger, in Niamey, would alternately ignore them, try to suppress them, or try outreach to them and do things for them, to make them feel more a part of Niger. And there was no consistency in that, and it led to both internal problems but problems that were exploitable by outside forces. In this case, particularly, meaning Libya.

Q: I'm noticing that the staffing at the embassy, like Kaduna, is basically a principal officer and then the econ commercial officer.

CHAVEAS: Well, the ambassador, DCM, an econ commercial officer. And, there was a large AID mission. And much of the administrative support for both AID and for the State component, as well as a small USIA component, much of that was done jointly. So, if you only look at the State presence, it looks like we had a disproportionately large admin and GSO [general services offices] function. But that was because it was serving more than one agency.

Q: Now, when you got there, Jim Bishop was the ambassador?

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: He was a Middle East guy, wasn't he?

CHAVEAS: No, no. Jim had spent most of his career in Africa.

Q: Okay. What was he like to work for?

CHAVEAS: Well, here again. Jim remains a good friend and we are in fairly regular contact, although he is geographically a long distance away. I have always said to other people that Jim and I remained good friends, in part, because he left much earlier than anticipated. Jim was a fantastic officer and has many achievements to his credit, but he was a micromanager. He was into absolutely everything, and therefore, functioning as his DCM could be a little challenging. But I arrived, I guess it was in September of '80, and by May of the following year, he had been called back to take a DAS [deputy assistant secretary] position in Washington. And I ended up being *chargé* for about ten months.

Q: Who were your main contacts in this assignment?

CHAVEAS: Well, again, they were pretty diverse. Number one, I traveled an awful lot and would visit either provincial government officials or traditional leaders in different places. And also, I spent a good deal of time down in the Zinder area, down near the Nigerian border. I mentioned that the *Tuareg* dominated up north and *Zarma* dominated the government because they were such a large part of the population in the South. Well, the *Hausa*, who lapped over from Nigeria and had all kinds of Nigerian connections, were the businesspeople of the country. And so, I spent a fair amount of time keeping in touch with some of them.

Back in the capital, well, it was the government officials. That went up to the ministerial level when I was DCM. And then, while I was *chargé*, I saw a lot of the president. And then, diplomatic colleagues. I particularly remember the fellow who was the French ambassador at that time. Alain Pierret was a very kind man, very helpful to me. He valued the relationship with the U.S. government, unlike his DCM or some of the other people on his staff. He thought being in close contact with the Americans was very worthwhile. And he was very helpful to me in dealing with suddenly being in charge of the mission instead of being the deputy. So, I valued that relationship very much.

Eventually, when Mitterrand became president, he got yanked. As it turned out, the reason he got yanked was that a delegation of French parliamentarians had traveled and had been very poorly treated by the embassy where they visited. Well, it ended up when a few people poked around a bit that the people in Paris who were responsible for yanking Alain back to Paris without a further assignment, had confused Nigeria with Niger. And so, he got blamed for whatever it was that the French Embassy in Nigeria had done. He eventually went on to be their ambassador to Israel, and their assistant secretary for our equivalent of IO.

Q: Now, speaking of the relationship back home, in '80, the Americans had a presidential election and a new administration came in in '81. Did that change anything that you were doing in Niger?

CHAVEAS: Well, it made us even more inclined to be supportive of the Nigeriens vis à vis Libya. And indeed, towards the end of my tenure as *chargé*, a military assessment team was sent out and we toured many places in Niger where the military were operating. In particular, we went up to northern Niger, to the areas where the Libyans were making claims, and we did it very openly. I was asked at one point whether I wanted the military people who were going up there to be wearing uniforms. I said I sure did, because we wanted to convey a message that we took an interest in the sovereignty of Niger's border. That we were interested in the capability of their military to address that threat to the best of their ability. That report and its outcome, I'm afraid, played out after I had left. So, I don't know exactly what we went on to supply them with, but there was every intention of supplying them with some additional hardware to make them a little more robust, up in that part of the country.

The other thing that had changed was that I ended up serving very briefly, only about three months, with a political appointee ambassador who could not have been more unqualified for the job. It was a horror show, quite frankly. William Casey, whom the French radio, which was often up to presenting misinformation with regards to the Americans in Africa, initially reported that the director of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] had been named Ambassador to Niger. It was not the same William Casey.

William Casey was a mining engineer who had, apparently, some difficulty holding down jobs during his career. But over the course of his career, one of his jobs related to Niger. He worked for an American company that had some mining rights in northern Niger, and so, he had visited the country. He knew where the capital was, who the president was. But the driving ambition was not his at all. It was his wife, who had been a volunteer for many, many years for a congressman in Colorado. A Republican congressman, and she very much wanted to be an ambassador's wife. And she convinced her congressman to back her husband at the White House, which he did. And lo and behold, he ended up being named Ambassador to Niger.

His arrival was repeatedly delayed because he could not master even the rudiments of the French language. They kept trying to get him up to a minimal level, kept extending his stay in Washington, and I don't know who gave up first but he eventually came out to Niamey about three months before I was scheduled to leave, and it was quite, quite painful. He didn't understand the purpose of an ambassador. One of the things he decided he had to achieve in his early months was that he wanted President Kountché to come to our Fourth of July reception.

President Kountché did not do that kind of thing for anybody. He had made an exception back in 1976 because of the Bicentennial, but otherwise, he did not do those kinds of things for any country. But the ambassador insisted that this was a priority and kept pushing and pushing and pushing and was unsuccessful. It was my understanding that after I left, he finally came to understand that he couldn't do the job outside the embassy, that he didn't understand it, he didn't have the language skills. And so, he turned to meddling in the embassy.

Q: We are about to be cut off so let's go back to the routine of rejoining.

CHAVEAS: Okay.

Q: Today is July 7, and we are returning to our conversation with Peter Chaveas.

Q: Chaveas. In 1983, you went from Niger to France. That must have been quite a transition.

CHAVEAS: That was '82.

Q: '82.

CHAVEAS: Yeah. It's been so long since we last spoke that I am not exactly sure where we left it. Do you recall that we discussed this assignment process that I went through to get that job?

Q: No, we haven't, so let us start there.

CHAVEAS: That proved to be quite a challenge, and I think an interesting insight into how the system worked at times. I had decided that---we had decided as a family that we needed an assignment outside of Africa. We had every intention of returning to Africa but we wanted a break. And so, amongst other things, I bid for the principal officer's job in Lyon. It was the second most highly bid position in the Foreign Service that cycle. The only job that got more bids was the DCM's job in Dublin.

The normal personnel system process proceeded and at the end, I was picked to be principal officer in Lyon. However, politics intervened. There was a political ambassador in France as usual, and he very much wanted a different officer assigned to that position. Somebody from his political section in Paris. And so, this became an issue, and personnel decided that this was at least one of the cases that they were going to make a big issue about protecting the integrity of the system. And as a result, things were kind of stalemated. The ambassador kept pushing for what he wanted.

The Director General, Joan Clark, got very personally engaged in this, to push for my assignment. I had some good allies in the Africa Bureau who were being of assistance, and anyway, it finally came down to being kicked up to Under Secretary Kennedy to make the final decision. At that point, it just so happened that he was going to Paris on other business. He went off on that trip and of course, the ambassador took very good care of him while he was there. He stayed at the residence and so on. And when Kennedy came back from that trip, he sat down with Joan Clark and her deputy, Andy Steigman.

Andy told me about that meeting but only a year later, after I was in Lyon and had been in Lyon for a good while. It seemed that Ambassador Kennedy came back and told Joan that he fully understood and appreciated what she was trying to do in protecting the integrity of the system but that the ambassador very much wanted this man assigned to the post in Lyon. And oh, by the way, that officer was an African American. You might think that was the end of the case, but Andy stood up and said, "But wait, Ambassador Kennedy, don't you know that the other man has a Hispanic surname". And that was the end of the conversation and the personnel system's choice stuck.

And I went to Lyon, which I found so ironic because although I am technically of Hispanic heritage---my grandfather was a Mexican---I knew nothing of that until I was nineteen years old. And I think I related all of this in the first chapter, and I had always resisted being so categorized by the personnel system. I believe firmly in affirmative action but I never felt that I was in any way disadvantaged by having this particular

heritage. I have no knowledge of the language. I don't know the culture. I am only technically of Hispanic background, but anyway, in this particular case, unbeknownst to me, it served my purpose very well.

Anyway, we were then packing to go to Lyon when I got a phone call from Jim Bishop, who was by that point a DAS in AF. He said, "I know you are going off to Lyon but I would like you to consider something. We are going to reopen our embassy N'Djamena in Chad". The Libyans had been forced out of the capital at that point and we were just beginning to reopen our operations there. And he asked if I would be interested in being *chargé*, with the understanding that probably after about a year, I would be nominated to be the ambassador.

It didn't take me very long to say, "Awfully interesting Jim but no. No, thank you. My family is very focused on this next assignment. We need a break. And I am coming back to Africa but not at this time". And it would have been, at least for a time, an unaccompanied post. There would have been no schooling for the children and so on. So, there were many reasons why it was not a good choice for us. My only regret is that if I had become the ambassador to Chad at that time, I would have been the first Peace Corps volunteer ever to return to his country of service as an ambassador.

Q: You know, there are quite a few people who returned as ambassadors.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: I interviewed Johnnie Carson.

CHAVEAS: Yep. Bob Gelbard was in fact the first one. Yeah.

Q: Yeah. And who was it in Thailand that I interviewed? Oh, Darryl Johnson. So anyway, when did you arrive in Lyon and what did the office and personal circumstances look like?

CHAVEAS: Well, we, first of all, did not live in Lyon. We lived in a small town about twenty-four, twenty-five kilometers outside of Lyon. That was a recent development. My predecessor had moved the residence out there, and it was a wonderful part of the experience. My kids went to the local school. They already spoke French from our Niger experience, and they just slotted right into the local primary school. It was a wonderful little village we lived in, and we had a wonderful real French experience as a result of that.

The office was in downtown Lyon, in a fairly prominent location, right on one of the two rivers. An interesting aspect of it was that, although there was a sizable staff, it wasn't enormous by any stretch of the imagination, but there were only two Americans. Everyone else was French. With one exception, there was a very good USIS [United States Information Service] person who was English by birth but had married a French

woman and had been in France for much of his life. So, it was an interesting experience in working very closely with all of those French staff and only having one other American around.

Q: What is the reason for having a consulate in Lyon?

CHAVEAS: Well, first of all, there is no longer any consulate in Lyon. There is a presence post there, one individual. But Lyon is the second largest metropolitan area in France. It was a major industrial and commercial center, and those were the primary reasons that we had representation there. Also, something that I worked on a lot was that there was a community of people, ranging from people holding senior elected office all the way down to average citizens, who retained some very strong memories of World War II, and the American role in that and the subsequent American role in helping to rebuild Europe.

So, there was a very large deposit of goodwill towards the United States that could be mined. My predecessor, for reasons that were never entirely clear to me, wasn't all that interested in that. And most particularly, he had tried to downplay one of the greatest aspects of that, and that was the fact that the city of Lyon was the only major city in all of the country that officially celebrated the Fourth of July. The background to that was that Édouard Herriot, who was the mayor of Lyon at the time that the Second World War ended---and also at one time had been the president of France---was a personal friend of Franklin Roosevelt's.

And because of that friendship, and the role that American troops played in the liberation of the city, he declared that henceforth, Lyon would celebrate the Fourth of July. As a result, there was a whole series of events that took place surrounding the holiday. On the 4th itself, a contingent of French military who were based nearby and who were part of a unit that was a direct descendant of a unit that had fought at Yorktown, would come to the consulate, parade in front of our building and then, two of their members would go up into our offices on the third or fourth floor and raise a new American flag. They would replace the flag that had been flying for the past year with a new one.

And along with all of that ceremony, the playing of course of both national anthems, there was a group of I would say, eight or ten older folks, who would show up every year and stand there and watch the ceremony in their pajamas. These were all survivors of the Holocaust, and that was an extraordinarily moving experience. Then there was a series of wreath layings at various memorials, mostly to the French resistance, around town. After that took place, around noon, there was a reception for much of the American community in the area, and for a variety of prominent French folks, given by the mayor of Lyon.

In response to that, we got a special allocation of representation funds, so that we could respond in kind. And there would be a huge reception. The last year that we were there, the number surpassed four hundred people on the back lawn of our home out in the French countryside. It involved an enormous amount of work for my wife and she always lived in terror of the possibility that it might rain on that particular day but it never did.

After our final Fourth, one of the major local papers ran a full page feature about the event. Above a picture of Lucille, the headline read “The triumph of Madame Chaveas”.

In addition, all over the part of the country that the Lyon consulate was responsible for, there were local units of something called “*France/Etats-Unis*”, “France-United States”. These were friendship groups that sought to keep alive links with the United States. I did a great deal of travel around the countryside that I was responsible for, often speaking to these groups in many towns and cities.

Q: How big was the consular district?

CHAVEAS: It combined three of the major regions of France. The Rhône-Alpes, which is centered around Lyon, and then in addition, the region that centered around Dijon, to the north of us, the Burgundy. And then, also to the west, the area that centered around Saint-Étienne and Clermont-Ferrand.

Q: But you didn't cover the coast?

CHAVEAS: No, we didn't touch on the coast at all.

Q: The other American was the consular officer, right?

CHAVEAS: Yes, indeed, except when he went on leave. He took care of all of the consular work, and my job was very heavily representational of various kinds.

Q: What kind of consular duties would appear from time to time?

CHAVEAS: Well, there was a certain amount of helping out Americans who had been the victims of pickpocketing or had otherwise lost their passports. But at that time, Lyon was not a part of France that attracted a whole lot of American tourists. Most often, the people that we saw in that category had been taking the train from Paris down to the coast and had found themselves in some way victimized while they were on the train. There was a substantial American community in the area, but it was almost entirely the American spouses of French citizens. And these were people who were quite well integrated into the local economy, and they would need our help from time to time with renewing passports or getting documents notarized for American purposes. But that wasn't a big part of the burden.

We issued a lot of non-immigrant visas to French citizens wishing to go to the United States for either business or tourism. We did not issue immigrant visas, that was all centralized in Paris. But over the time I was there, we started to see a lot of applications coming in from other parts of the world. We picked up a number of Iranian applicants applying for non-immigrant visas, and we particularly started to pick up Nigerian applicants. That was interesting because, you know, as soon as it started to become significant, my vice consul called this to my attention.

We agreed that the next time that a Nigerian came in seeking a non-immigrant visa, I would do the interview, having had past experience in Nigeria. So, I went down and, on several occasions, interviewed Nigerians, and asked a variety of questions that they clearly had not expected, and which they weren't very good at answering. And I think that probably had an impact on the fact that the flow of Nigerians did not disappear, but it certainly slowed down.

Q: Now, was there much of a diplomatic community there?

CHAVEAS: There was. The Brits were there. Probably the most interesting was the Turks. There is a very substantial and influential Armenian community in the Lyon area, a number of Armenians who have been quite successful in business, including a few who run excellent restaurants. And of course, the Turks are always very concerned with any situation where they find the Armenians exercising influence. It was an issue in Paris as well, and the French governments tended to be very sympathetic to the Armenian view on whether or not there had been a genocide in Turkey in the early 20th century.

So, the Turk amongst other things, had a monthly representational allowance that surpassed my annual representation allowance. He was a very interesting fellow, as was his wife. Both were very gracious people and we enjoyed them. We also enjoyed the Brits. And there was quite a collection of other folks, almost all Europeans. Almost all---I was somewhat the odd man out in that community, with the exception of myself and the Turk. Otherwise, these were all people much older, probably on the last assignment of their careers and Lyon was for them a nice retirement spot.

Q: You are quite some distance from Paris. How was the advice coming down from the embassy?

CHAVEAS: Well, we were not as far as you might think. This was when the high-speed train first was becoming a reality in France. So, you could go from downtown Lyon to downtown Paris in two hours, which was a lot faster than trying to fly. But that aside, working with the embassy in Paris was interesting because the Bureau back in Washington had impressed upon me and my counterparts in other posts, that they would like to see far more reporting out of the post than had been the case in the past.

The embassy never explicitly said this, but the message was pretty clear that they were not comfortable with that direction at all. And whether they were comfortable or not, I always had to scratch my head as to how they expected us, anybody expected us to do this. There were no classified communications with Lyon, except for a very infrequent pouch service, about once a month I think. And the only communications that we had which did permit us to communicate with Washington other than telephone, was a teletype machine. Obviously unclassified, and it was operated by one of our French employees.

So, I did make an effort to do some political reporting but only what I could do unclassified, I think, was of limited value because it was the kind of thing that you could

read, for the most part, in the French media. You didn't need a consulate general to do that. And the classified stuff that I would do, I had to handwrite on a yellow legal pad, put it into the infrequent post pouch service and have it conveyed that way up to Paris, where I was told it would be produced in a form that could be sent to Washington. Well, with one exception, I never once received any feedback to any of that stuff that I sent up that way. And I was never entirely convinced that it even got reproduced and passed on.

The one exception was that I had had a particularly good relationship with a colonel in the Niger Army while I posted in Niamey. As I was being assigned to Lyon, he was assigned to a one-year scholarship at the *École de Guerre* (War College) in Paris. Not too long after I got to Lyon, he contacted me and asked when I would next be in Paris. I told them I was coming up soon, and we agreed to have lunch.

We had lunch, and during that lunch, he conveyed a message to me that---he never explicitly told me had come from his president---but I knew enough of where he sat and how this Niger government operated that I was one hundred percent confident that that message actually came from his president. And the gist of the message was that they were very concerned about our ambassador in Niamey, and would I please convey that concern for Washington, which I did, in the most tightly held fashion that I could. I do know that that message was sent and that's where it was left, at least as far as I was concerned.

Q: Interesting. In March of '84, the consul general in Strasbourg was shot in an attempted assassination.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: Lyon has some relation to this incident?

CHAVEAS: Well, indeed. There was a Palestinian group that had been targeting American and Israeli diplomats in France. And in fact, one American and one Israeli had been killed. There was also an attempt on the life of our chargé in Paris at one point. From a security standpoint, we really didn't have much in Lyon, and the attitude of the embassy in Paris was that this was a Paris problem that the Palestinians more than anything else, craved publicity for their issues.

And because of the highly centralized nature of the media in France, there was little risk that they were going to do something outside of the city. Well, of course, then the consul general in Strasbourg was injured---he was extremely lucky, it was really a very slight injury. There was a combination of circumstances that protected him. But nonetheless, that made it clear that the Palestinian group was quite willing to try its luck elsewhere.

And so, immediately, each of the Consul Generals was sent a fully armored vehicle which was interesting. It is a challenge to drive one of those under any circumstances, but French traffic is a very interesting phenomenon. And we were not given drivers until much later, we were driving these ourselves, with no training relevant to that. We also

received permission from the French government to conceal carry handguns. And so, we utilized both of those things. I carried a .38 revolver.

An interesting sidelight was that not long after we got that authorization, the security office in Paris sent out a somewhat sheepish memo, because they had become aware that while some of us, myself included, had in fact had training and had made use of handguns---that a couple of our colleagues had not. They had never used a firearm in their lives. So, the real kicker in this memo was to warn us that if we found ourselves in a situation where we felt the need to use the sidearm, do not fire it in the armored car.

The French police added a 24/7 presence in front of our consulate. I also had a follow car going to and from work, and for a time, going to and from a variety of other events. Basically, anytime that I requested it. And also, my wife, who was in the habit of simply letting our kids walk to school from our house---it was maybe a quarter of a mile---was warned that she should accompany our children to school. The kids never really understood why that was necessary. They had been walking to school for ages.

Q: We are about to be cut off here, so---

CHAVEAS: Okay.

Q: Let's take a break.

CHAVEAS: ---One morning, I came out of the gate of our house, by this time with a driver for the armored car, and sitting right outside the gate was the police follow car which I had come to expect. We started down the road and the driver said, "Sir, the police are running down the road, wanting us to stop". So, we stopped, and I opened the door and the police, there were two of them, said, "Our car won't start. Can we ride with you?"

Q: Your next assignment was in the embassy in Nigeria. Now, you had a lot of Nigerian experience. How did this opportunity come up?

CHAVEAS: Well, I believe earlier on, in talking about my time in AF/W, I was the Nigeria desk officer, I mentioned that I had worked particularly closely with Tom Smith, who was the office director. I developed a great respect for Tom, and I think it was mutual because as I was groping around looking for an opportunity to go back to Africa, which is what I really wanted to do, I got a call from Tom, who was by now the ambassador to Nigeria. He paid me a great compliment. He said, "I have three counselor positions opening up, which one do you want?". And the three positions were admin, econ and political.

We quickly agreed that I didn't have the background to be the admin officer, particularly in a major post. But I expressed a preference for being the econ counselor because I was

an econ officer and had never actually occupied an econ designated position up to that point. Well, in a story that is probably too long, complicated to bother with, the personnel system once again had an officer that it wanted to put into that econ position. It was a senior officer position and for various reasons, they were very insistent on putting that individual into that slot. So, I took the political position, which was also a senior position even though I was not a senior officer at that time. And I became the political counselor in Nigeria.

Q: This was a particularly interesting time.

CHAVEAS: It was.

Q: Didn't you start off with a coup?

CHAVEAS: Well, the coup took place just before we were about to go to Nigeria. Actually, it was a second coup, there had been two in close succession. Before we leave the subject of how I got the job, I should mention that much to my regret, I got to post and found that Tom Smith had been medevaced from post. He had what would prove to be terminal cancer. Under most circumstances, he would have never returned to post, he was quite ill, but Tom was an extraordinary officer. His father was English and Tom was very much of the stiff upper lip category. Had a very strong sense of his duty. And also, he was a Marine. He insisted on returning to Lagos not only to make proper farewell calls, but also so he could attend the Marine Ball that particular year. And he spoke to the Marines, there was not a dry eye in the room, and he then departed post.

Anyway, as to the situation in Nigeria, a coup had ended the experiment in democratic rule, which was on the horizon when I had been the desk officer. And, ironically enough, the military officer who led that was a fellow named Buhari [Muhammadu Buhari]. Well, Buhari today is the democratically elected---and I would add, a very ineffective president of Nigeria. But he didn't last very long as the military head of state because he was then overthrown by General Babangida [Ibrahim Babangida]. And Babangida came into power and ruled for quite some time, the entire time that I was there as a political counselor and beyond.

It was quite a tumultuous period in Nigeria. I know many experts would disagree with me on this. I think the more common view of Babangida was that he was just in it for his own power and a great deal of wealth, which is what he acquired. I think he came into power for those reasons but also, he did come with some vision for his country. He quickly found himself very, very frustrated in pursuit of that vision. And so, the vision fell away and was overtaken by a period in which corruption overwhelmed Nigerian society, and it is a major, major factor in the country to this day. I always make the comparison that when I was in northern Nigeria in the mid-70s oil wealth started to really become an enormous factor in the economy. And corruption wasn't new to Nigeria at that point, they had plenty of experience with it.

But in those years, as more and more money became available, there was a sense of shame about participating in the corruption. That didn't stop many people, but at least they generally didn't want it bandied about that they were involved in corruption. There was a sense of what was too much. There was also a tendency, if one was involved in corrupt activities, to reinvest a lot in your own community. It wasn't just about personal accumulation. By the time I came back in the '80s, all of that was gone. The amounts of money that were being stolen just defied belief. Most of it was going out of the country. And the attitude widely held was that if you had the opportunity to participate in it and chose not to, you were a fool. And that just had terrible negative implications for the way society operated, and it still does.

Q: Nigerian society has its own ethnic divisions. How did that impact what you were seeing?

CHAVEAS: Well, again, I sometimes find it hard to sort out what I thought then about the situation and what I have come to believe, as I have continued to watch the country fairly closely. But I think, one has to conclude, and I think I certainly had some sense of this back then, that Nigeria is a fundamentally ungovernable country. That is not to say it is going to disappear in disunity, or to say that there isn't a population of folks who are very, very proud to be Nigerians, as well as members of whatever tribe they belong to. But there are not enough of them, and they are torn by various sectional issues.

The dependence of the country so overwhelmingly on petroleum income is a big, big issue because while it is shared in various ways all over the country with the elites, its source is in one part of the country, in the east and south particularly, the southeast part of the country, which of course, was Biafra back in the '60s. And then you add in things that came along subsequent to my time as political counselor, but you add in Boko Haram, this Islamist group. You add in Al Qaeda and ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] which were operating elsewhere in West Africa and have in some ways intervened in Nigeria.

And also, one of the phenomena that Boko Haram started was kidnapping school children, and holding them for ransom, or to turn them into converts. It would appear that not only does that continue to go on but there are a lot of criminal elements in Nigeria today who simply think, "Oh, well, that's a good gig. Let's go attack a school somewhere and kidnap a whole bunch of children and see what we can make out of that". So, it is a country that lives with a level of what you can only call chaos that I think the average American would find unfathomable. There are Nigerians who managed to live with that and even thrived with it. But it is not governance in the sense that I think most of us would understand the term.

Q: Now, would this be the period where Boko Haram began?

CHAVEAS: No, that came later. That came later after I was gone.

Q: Now, Angola issues were always very high profile during this time.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: Did the embassy get involved in reporting or contacting the various groups in Angola?

CHAVEAS: Well, we were primarily involved in contacting the Nigerians on this subject. Nigeria, despite all of its woes, remained a significant player on the diplomatic scene throughout Africa. It was the richest and largest, most militarily capable actor on the scene and so, they were very involved in those negotiating efforts. We saw a fair amount of Chet Crocker [Chester Crocker] at that time, as he was shuttling back and forth, trying to negotiate the independence of then South West Africa.

Q: Now, you are saying Nigeria had an outsized influence, but they were also getting to become involved with UN [United Nations] peacekeeping operations?

CHAVEAS: Yes, they were, yeah. To this day, they remain a particular part of that. That said, the army in Nigeria has had some extraordinary ups and downs in terms of its capabilities and discipline, and its ability to contribute positively to that kind of activity. But yes, they have been significant players and they would be very important players later on when I was involved with Sierra Leone.

Q: Now, in the role of peacekeepers, did we have special military relationship training, or a large defense attaché group in the embassy?

CHAVEAS: We had a modest defense attaché and security assistance office. As I recall, there were a total of four officers in that shop. And we ran a variety of training programs for the Nigerians, both sending individuals or small groups of Nigerians to the States, and also some training teams in country.

Q: Well, in your diplomatic situation, I presume that was a fairly heavy diplomatic community. Who were the main actors though?

CHAVEAS: Well, the Brits, of course. But there was a very large presence of diplomats because not only did most countries want to conduct relations with Nigeria, but they often used Lagos as a regional base, ambassadors that would be posted there who were accredited to several neighboring countries as well. We probably had more interaction with the Brits than anybody else but the Indians were a significant presence. I recall the Australian embassy is kind of hitting above its weight, with some very good people present.

Funny enough, right next to our building was the Bulgarian embassy. And I recall one occasion when there was a demonstration along the road that ran in front of both of those embassies and several others, which was clearly intended for us. But the police came in and blocked them so that they couldn't get to the front of the American embassy. They were all congregated in front of the Bulgarian embassy. And later that day, our *chargé* Don Gelber [Herbert Donald Gelber] was at a reception and ran into his Bulgarian

colleague and asked him, “Why were those people demonstrating against you?”. The Bulgarian wasn’t amused.

Q: Now, what were the American facilities like at that time?

CHAVEAS: Well, we still had a constituent post up in Kaduna. The embassy was a fairly large building in an enclave that the Nigerians had set aside for the diplomatic presence. It was a substantial building and one of the few places that I was ever posted where we had a full marine contingent. Our building was separated from the downtown part of Lagos by one of the many inlets that dotted the city. We had to cross a bridge to get over to the many government buildings and other places that we might want to visit for whatever reason. And traffic in Lagos was legendary, so that was always a bit of a challenge. USIS still had an operation in what had been the embassy building on the other side of that bridge so, there was an American presence over there as well.

Q: The American mission has been fairly large.

CHAVEAS: Yeah.

Q: What was the morale of the community like?

CHAVEAS: There were a million reasons why it should have been bad, but it wasn't, by and large. We had a good bunch of people who were willing to do the best they could with the various challenges that just living and trying to do your job in Nigeria posed. And we did the very best that we could, I felt, to make life reasonably comfortable in an environment that wasn't all that comfortable. There are always exceptions, particularly at a post that large but it worked pretty darn well. And then, towards the end of my tour---well, I overlapped with Ambassador Princeton Lyman for about six months, I guess. And he did great things for morale and was very, I would say, beloved by the staff.

Q: What would be some of the things that Princeton would have done to make an impact?

CHAVEAS: I would say more than anything else, here was this man who was absolutely brilliant, and who never used that to lord over anybody. He always made it clear that he respected other people for their abilities to do their job. To maybe give a sense of that, he did a lot of public speaking. And he would, depending on what the audience was, what the subject was going to be, have various officers draft the speech for him. And whoever it was, would go in, sit down with him, get a sense of where he wanted to go and then come back later with a draft. And time after time, the final speech would barely bear any resemblance to the draft that had been produced.

And yet, he was always complimentary, always appreciative of the input that he had received. And I think one of the greatest compliments that I ever received from Princeton, was that I had drafted speeches for him and had the same kind of experience, but one time I drafted a speech for him, and except for adding a quote from a particular Nigerian

author, he delivered the speech twice, word for word as I had written it. And I can't tell you what that did for my ego.

Q: Speaking of the mission's ego, I believe there was an inspector general visit during the time that you were there?

CHAVEAS: There probably was but I am not sure I remember that.

Q: We talked about Angola. Looking around the border, what was the relationship with Chad?

CHAVEAS: Well, that was something that I was very involved with. The Chadians had, as I mentioned earlier, had just managed to drive the Libyans out of their capital and were progressively driving them out of the country almost completely. There was a crying need for assistance to the country, mostly food. And getting food into Chad is a challenge, particularly if the Nigerians are not cooperating, because that was the principal route to get relief in, to truck it across from Lagos or other ports up to N'Djamena. The Nigerians were not being helpful in a variety of ways. They did not have the best of relations with the leadership in Chad at that point. I believe, more than anything else, because the leadership in Chad had a military which, despite its smaller size, had on a couple of occasions shown itself to be much more capable than the Nigerians. Had bloodied the nose of the Nigerians a couple of times.

That was resented, and also the Nigerians just have a great love of a bureaucracy, and also of trying to milk some kind of benefit out of being in a situation like that where they might receive some benefit from facilitating the movement of food or most anything else through their ports and across their country. There were also always some suspicions on their part that maybe there was something else in that aid other than relief supplies. Anyway, I had the principal responsibility for liaison with the Chadian ambassador in town and that proved to be interesting, trying to work with him to influence the Nigerians.

But also, I discovered that he was from the village where I had been a Peace Corps Volunteer. I had not known him at all because he was in high school at the time that I was a volunteer. And there was no high school in that town so he had lived in another town where he could attend high school. However, I knew his father who was the area chief. I knew a couple of his brothers. So anyway, we got along famously, and he updated me a bit on my old Peace Corps village and some people that I have known there and that was an interesting sidelight.

Q: One of the diplomatic issues that came up was Nigerian recognition of Israel.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, I know that was an issue and that is a head scratcher for me. Just one of those things that I don't recall but yes, it was. That was always significant.

Q: I am running out of thoughts here. Is there anything else about being the political counselor that we need to cover?

CHAVEAS: Well, I'll just mention one other thing concerning the coup that took place---the one that took place just before I arrived, about a week before I arrived. Another element of the mission had known in advance that the coup was going to happen because they had contact with the majors and lieutenant colonels who actually conducted the coup. Because they had that connection, that particular insight, it was my estimate that they became overly enamored with their understanding of the situation through those particular contacts.

And so, it led to some disagreements about how the political section did its reporting. I usually found myself to be more pessimistic in my analysis. I usually describe myself as either guardedly pessimistic, or guardedly optimistic. I wavered between the two from time to time. But I think that future events proved me right that we had a better understanding of the broader context in which all of this was going on. But anyway, it led to some interesting negotiations while producing some of our reporting.

Q: While you were there in January '87, Secretary Schultz visited Lagos. Prepping for a secretary's visit must have been pretty interesting?

CHAVEAS: That visit was very brief, he didn't even stay overnight, as I recall. The visit was basically an acknowledgement of the major role that the Nigerians were playing with respect to Angola and South West Africa and South Africa. And so, he had the anticipated meetings one would expect surrounding such a high level with the Nigerians. All of that went pretty much as expected, and frankly, it was more of a show of respect for the Nigerians than anything else.

But he agreed to do a press conference, and at that time, the Nigerian press, by and large, was a very, very freewheeling bunch with little interest in facts. A lot of creativity in their reporting and their questioning of whomever they happen to be interviewing. We were very concerned about what kind of question out of left field might be thrown at the Secretary. So, we spent an unusual amount of time briefing him on the array of issues that we thought might come up. And then, he went into the press conference, gave a brief statement, and then opened things up to the questions. There was a fair crowd in the room. Silence. There were no questions, no comments. No one said anything. He waited a reasonable amount of time and bid them farewell.

Q: Well, let's end this session at this point.

Q: Good morning. It is July 21, we are returning to our conversation with Ambassador Chavez.

CHAVEAS: Chavez.

Q: How do I get that right? It's not a consonant thing. It is how the word is broken, right?

CHAVEAS: I suppose so, yeah. Although what confuses people an awful lot is the V-E-A-S. Many people want to make it easy, which in fact is what it originally was, or want to make it I-S. And then also, a lot of people, which particularly fascinates me, who spend every Sunday in church cannot imagine that the CH is pronounced Cha-vis. They want to pronounce it Sha-vis. Anyway.

Q: Well, the accent is there. You have, your last post was Nigeria. Let me start this on.

CHAVEAS: Oh, okay. You asked me before about an IG [inspector general] inspection and last time around, I drew a blank on that then. But then subsequently, we talked about Princeton Lyman and Princeton Lyman's leadership of the embassy and his style, how he was so effective. It did occur to me that the leader of the inspection team commented to me during the inspection that he marveled at how good morale was because he found Lyman devoid of charisma, and he just couldn't comprehend how Ambassador Lyman was so effective at maintaining morale, but of course, we talked about that the last time around.

The other thing that I completely forgot is about Nigeria and the drug trade, which was an issue in my job. I was the overall mission coordinator of the response to this issue and it included several elements of the embassy. We had a DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] representative in country. USIS [United States Information Service] was very involved in our efforts in this regard and the problem we were addressing up front was the fact that so many individual Nigerians or Nigerian criminal organizations have become quite prominent in international trade. And up until about this time, they had largely stayed away from Nigeria itself. They were involved elsewhere in the world in a major way. Well, inevitably, that started to leak into Nigeria itself and we spent quite a bit of time trying to convince the government that this was a real problem that they needed to think about seriously. Our DEA agent was working closely with his counterparts, providing a lot of training, equipment and some dogs. We really spent a lot of capital on trying to deal with this issue.

We were really up against it though, for a variety of reasons, but I would guess that probably the most---well, obviously, there was so much money involved in it that it can seep in almost anywhere and corrupt an already corrupted system, but most prominent of all of this was the fact that the wife of General Babangida was deeply involved with this. He seemed to keep his distance but she was up to her eyeballs in it and that was pretty hard to deal with. And drug use and drug trade progressively slipped into Nigerian society and became quite an issue. But as part of that effort on our part, we got the Minister of Justice invited to the United States for a visit, and this was a prominent lawyer whom we regarded as being somebody of real integrity and who was very focused on the drug issue. I escorted him to the States and that was actually how I ended up in Jo'burg.

When I went home, there was a State Department eighth floor luncheon for the Minister. I sat next to Ken Brown [Kenneth Brown], who at that time was one of the deputy assistant secretaries in AF [Bureau of African Affairs]. His immediate previous assignment had been as principal officer in Jo'burg. He had been replaced by a fellow named Montgomery. I didn't know the gentleman at all but Montgomery went out to post, his wife did not accompany him, and after two or three months, he decided he was not interested in continuing and he also had a nice job offer back in New York. So, he left the service and suddenly, what was considered a very important post at that time was vacant and there was no one in the pipeline. And so, Ken Brown would not let me eat until I promised that I would give this serious consideration.

Frankly, it did not take a whole lot of time. I took time to consult with Lucille who was back in Lagos. She knew how excited I was by the offer and agreed on the condition that we not leave Lagos until after Christmas. And we had to figure out how to tell the kids who had been overseas for three straight assignments at this point and very much thought they were going home on the next assignment. So, we came up with the promise of a dog which they have never had before. And, we told them how they would have a swimming pool and tennis courts in their backyard. Later as we flew into Johannesburg and happened to fly immediately over the neighborhood where we would be living the kids were looking down at the ground and they were saying, "Everybody has a swimming pool and a tennis court". But anyway, life went on.

Q: This kind of immediate assignment, did that give you an opportunity to get briefed on South Africa things? Touch bases with the desk, or you just went from one post to another?

CHAVEAS: I pretty much went from one post to the other. You know, I was reading a lot of stuff from a long distance but pretty much, it was just me digging into whatever I could find while at the same time, continuing to do my job in Lagos. I negotiated with the Department on the understanding that we would not leave Lagos until after Christmas and we did that right after the New Year.

Q: Now of course, Ken would have told you his expectations and why he thought this was such a good idea. But let me ask you, what was your expectation of this job before you arrived?

CHAVEAS: Well, you know, as someone who was making a career in Africa, it was impossible to miss the fact that one of the most critical issues on the entire continent, one of the most critical issues for United States interests, was the future of South Africa. And so, in that sense, I had been a student of the issue for quite some time but from a distance. And frankly, when Ken offered me that possibility, I absolutely jumped at the opportunity to be directly engaged. It really excited me and so I was very anxious to get out there and be involved. And I was told in advance that my primary responsibility as principal officer would be outreach to the opposition community. Much of the opposition community, the organized opposition to apartheid, was in and around Jo'burg and so, that was really top of the list for my responsibilities.

Q: How much, give us a description of the office and then the office staffing.

CHAVEAS: Well, we had our office on the fourth and fifth or fifth and sixth floors of a large office building. I think, probably twelve or more stories high, right in the center of Jo'burg. The building was known as the Kine Centre, the "Kine" meaning Afrikaans for cinema. And it was so called because much of the lowest floor was a big multiplex movie theater, and we had a substantial staff there. Much of the consular work for the entire northern part of the country was done in Jo'burg, not in Pretoria. Pretoria issued diplomatic visas and some other limited categories of visas but all the immigrant visa and NIV [non-immigrant visa], business, for the northern part of South Africa was done in Joburg, as well as an awful lot of American citizen services. There were a lot of American citizens in the area. Much of the consular work was done by national employees with oversight by three American officers.

We had a political officer, a labor officer and a regional minerals officer because of the extensive mining activities in that part of the world.. In a separate building, we had a USIS presence of some significance, and so, not an insignificant presence. We also had a Foreign Commercial Service presence and that was one of my significant management challenges while I was there. We had of course, by that time sanctioned South Africa extensively and so, actually, commercial relations were greatly constrained. I did from time to time have to remind my FCS colleague of those constraints, because he was quite gung-ho to do more business than we could appropriately do.

Q: Now, you are comparing the consular load between Pretoria and Joburg, but those two missions are what, fifty miles apart?

CHAVEAS: They were very close physically and got closer over the time we were there because the highway between the two cities was vastly improved and expanded while I was there, so the trip got shorter. I went up to Pretoria almost every week for country team meetings and again, a management challenge here was particularly making sure that we weren't falling over each other. You know, while my primary responsibility and the primary responsibility of our labor and political officers were outreach to the black African community, the embassy political section had obvious interests in those things as well. And so often, we would discover that we had double scheduled with particular contacts in Soweto or elsewhere around the area and deconfliction was a frequent challenge.

Q: Well, didn't the South African government move from Pretoria to?

CHAVEAS: To Cape Town.

Q: To Cape Town.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, they spent part of the year down in Cape Town during the legislative session, because the legislature was based in Cape Town. And portions of the embassy

would move at that time. The ambassador would move, the political counselor would move, a few other people would go down and they would function out of the consulate general down there.

Q: So that kind of left the northern part of the country vacant for a little while for you to work?

CHAVEAS: Well, yeah but there was a substantial political section in Pretoria so, they weren't stripping it. There were still officers up there doing their various things.

Q: Now, when you, about the time that you arrived, there was quite a bit of uncertainty in the political situation. De Klerk was made state president in September of '89 but he had actually become leader of the National Party earlier. I presume that you were doing a lot of reporting about those sorts of trends?

CHAVEAS: Well, we arrived there in January of '88 and that period was about as bad as apartheid ever got. There were massive detentions going on. There were killings that were obviously the work of the security services. I recalled that the first two weekends after we arrived, I attended funerals in Soweto. And in both cases, they involved the death of a young black South African, fourteen, fifteen-years-old, who had been detained by the police, disappeared into who knows what prison and when inquiries were made later on about these young men, the police would say, "Oh, well, we released them last week", and what they released them to was being thrown lifeless into a field somewhere where their bodies were eventually discovered and then there was a funeral.

So, I was at the famous Catholic Church in Soweto, *Regina Mundi* where these funerals were held. I did an awful lot of those kinds of things over the course of my time there. A good part of what we did in interacting with the black African community, the opponents of apartheid, was to be present---to be there, show that the United States was interested in their dilemma and that we shared some of their pain.

Q: So, that sounds like it was a fairly [common presentation] you got for you and your staff.

CHAVEAS: One of the things that became a standard part of my activity involved these massive detentions that were going on. There were a variety of efforts to try and get information about who was being detained, where, under what conditions, and of course, when possible, to get their release. There was an organization which arranged what they called "tea parties". They were called tea parties because it was illegal to have any kind of political gathering, and these tea parties were for the friends and family of those who had been detained to do two things: number one, to show them that there was somebody out there who cared about their situation, but secondly, to cull any information whatsoever that might be available; when were they arrested? Do you know anything about where they were taken? So on and so forth.

Because as awful as apartheid was, the Afrikaners always liked to present the facade that they were operating in accordance with law and a clever attorney could drag them into court often and obtain information, obtain access and even sometimes release of some of these detainees. So, these tea parties were organized for that purpose. One of the things that the organizers did was they very purposefully invited representatives from a handful of foreign missions, the U.S. amongst them, the British, the Australians, Canadians, with the understanding that, A) we would attend, and B) we would inform the police that we were going to be present. The rationale there was that if the police knew that there was diplomatic presence, they would be much more reticent about breaking up these gatherings. And so, I and other diplomatic colleagues did that with some frequency.

It did lead eventually to the only experience I have ever had of getting arrested. These "tea parties" took place in various locations, and one of them at one time was held in a church in a township called Alexandria, which was known as one of the rougher townships in the entire area. We gathered in this church and things proceeded pretty much as they had in previous tea parties, until somebody noticed out the window that we were ringed by the military. Shortly after that, the military got on the bullhorn, informed us that no one would be permitted to leave the building, that the security police were on their way and that they would be coming in to process everyone. I believe that was the word they used, "process" everyone.

So, while we were waiting for the security police to arrive, the four or five diplomats who were present, there was myself and one other American, a Brit, and I am not sure I remember the others exactly, but we all huddled with the organizer of this event and it was agreed that we would not identify ourselves to the security police when they came. That we would be there to be flies on the wall, see what was going on. The police showed up and proceeded to process these people, which meant that they were having them come up and be individually questioned, forced to identify themselves in some manner. And that was proceeding reasonably for a time but then the police started getting rough, they were slapping some people around, pushing them around and at that point, the organizers identified us to the police.

Well, there was huge embarrassment on the part of the police. They had not known we were there. Somewhere along the line, communications had broken down and the word had not gotten to them and immediately they stopped what they were doing and the senior officer met with us and was profusely apologetic. He said, "We did not know you were here. We are very sorry and of course, you are free to leave anytime you want to". To which I responded, "Are we free to stay?". Well, that caused considerable consternation and he went away, consulted with some of his colleagues, and got on his phone. I assume he was talking to his headquarters, and ultimately, he came back to the group of us and said, "You are free to stay". And we did until the whole proceeding was over. The police continued to process people, but they were no longer beating up anybody or pushing them around. Beating up was an exaggeration, but they had been pushing around and slapping a few people, and that stopped for the duration. Now, what might have happened to some of those people after the whole gathering broke up and we were gone, I really had no way of telling.

Q: Now, your diplomatic colleagues, were they also stationed in Joburg? Or did they come down from Pretoria?

CHAVEAS: Some were from Pretoria. The British had a big presence in Jo'burg and I know there were some other consulates, I'm afraid I don't recall exactly which ones but as you mentioned before, the two cities were very close, so it was easy for embassies in Pretoria to send people down for something like this.

Q: Now, as you are saying the township revolts were going in process when you arrived but then early in '89, de Klerk came forward and changed the dynamics. Was that a Pretoria issue or was that a Joburg issue?

CHAVEAS: Well, both. Late in '88, P.W. Botha had suffered a stroke and before he gave up, it was pretty obvious to folks that he was going to have to leave the presidency. There were the beginnings of some rumblings that something might be in the works to change. People didn't put too much faith in that, but there were some indications that there might be some change. One of the results of that sense that maybe, there was going to be a change was that we started to get a lot of expressed interest from senators and members of Congress about visits to South Africa. And in the first half of December, Senators Boren of Oklahoma and Nunn of Georgia came on a CODEL [congressional delegation] and visited with folks. In addition, many of the major prisoners except for Mandela, were released in this period and that was an obvious positive development.

The Boren-Nunn visit was interesting for various reasons. The day that they arrived, it was a Sunday afternoon. They were staying in a hotel in Joburg, one right across the street from the consulate general and we had much of the country team, including the ambassador of course, down from Pretoria to meet with them in that hotel for a briefing. And during that discussion, the subject of whether they should make a call on Winnie Mandela came up.

Winnie Mandela had begun to become very controversial within the anti-apartheid community at that time. There were allegations, very credible allegations at that time, of a group of so-called "football players", a team that she sponsored who were really just a gang of toughs, who were frankly, terrorizing some other Africans because they didn't happen to be in line with Winnie's particular views. We would eventually find out, what later became public and was a matter of a public trial, that she was directly involved in a murder. We had inklings of that at that time, but we did not know for certain. Anyway, during the briefing, the two senators asked whether we thought that they should ask for a meeting with Winnie. It went around the circle. I believe I was the next to last to speak to that subject, and I expressed some real reservations about whether they should meet with her, specifically because of what I have just described. It was then passed to the ambassador to be the final speaker and he was emphatic that they should meet with Winnie.

I was then assigned the responsibility for arranging that meeting, and because our office had repeatedly arranged such meetings, we had some people on our staff, some South Africans who knew her well and knew how to access her. She was quite a difficult person to deal with on matters like that and undependable, but anyway, we talked about arranging the meeting. The meeting eventually did take place but it took some time to arrange and certain members of the senators' staff interpreted that as me attempting to prevent the meeting. I ended up getting a call from Ambassador Perkins who told me that he fully understood what I was dealing with and that he did not share that view in any way, shape or form, but that I should make myself scarce for the balance of the visit. They did eventually meet with Winnie Mandela as we organized.

Q: So, there was great congressional interest at that time but now you are reporting back to Washington. What was the embassy reporting like? Trying to guide Washington? And what signals were you getting out, what policy signals were you getting out of Washington?

CHAVEAS: Well, you know, we were in the business of trying to encourage this evolution.

And as I recall, embassy reporting and our reporting certainly reflected our view that there were real indications of positive change. Nothing that you could bet the house on but there was movement, and from the standpoint of the consulate general, there was an event that we've kind of jumped over in time, but which had a major impact for us, and I think for our credibility with the anti-apartheid community.

One day in September 1988, I had been out of the consulate all morning because I had a variety of appointments in different parts of town. I got back to the consulate at about noon and Tom Furey [Thomas Furey], my deputy, greeted me at the door and said, "We have a problem". Well, the problem was in the persons of three very prominent leaders of the UDF, the United Democratic Front, which was the most important internal opposition movement, as opposed to the ANC [African National Congress], which had its center of gravity outside the country. These three individuals had, under bizarre circumstances, arrived at the consulate. They had all been in detention for quite some time. They had all reported themselves as ill and had been taken to a nearby hospital and managed, apparently the security was very, very lax, and they managed to sneak out of the hospital and come to the consulate. And they were now in our back room asking to be protected.

We had a problem immediately because although we knew the names of all these people, there were no Americans on our staff who had been in country long enough to have ever known these people, to have ever seen them. They had disappeared into detention. It was illegal to publish the photograph of anyone held in detention. So, we were operating blindly as we tried to assess if these people were really who they claimed to be. We couldn't depend on the assessment of our national staff because we knew that some of them would be subject to pressure from the South African security police.

We continued to have conversations with the three and it came out during those conversations that they had a lawyer. I knew this particular lawyer. His office was five or six floors above us, so I trotted up to his office and I described to him what we were dealing with. And he dismissed it, he said, "That's ridiculous". He said, "They are in detention, they can't possibly be in your office".

So, I went back down and we continued to question them somewhat skeptically. And this went on and on for a while. Meanwhile, of course, we have notified Pretoria of what was going on and they in turn have notified Washington. And we continued to discuss this with these guys and finally I went back up to the lawyer and I said, "Chris, please, it is only five or six stories down. Could you just come down and see these guys and tell them that they are not who they claim to be?".

Well, he went down with us. There were embraces all around, oh my god, this you know, he was absolutely thrilled as were they. And then we confirmed that these were indeed Murphy Morobe, Vusi Khanyile and Mohammed Valli Moosa, all of whom had held prominent positions in the UDF before they went into prison. And we proceeded from there. We provided them with---we turned one of our store rooms into a bedroom, threw mattresses on the floor. We turned our conference room into a kind of a lounge and had a TV up there for them, and they ended up being with us for five weeks and there was quite a song and dance with the South African Government.

Their initial reaction to this was, well, it was two different things. First of all, there were rumblings about whether a consulate enjoyed the same protections that an embassy did. At that time, we were in the middle of a major security upgrade of our offices. If the South Africans had decided that they wanted to barge in, there was not going to be too much to stop them. But at the same time, the South Africans were also saying, "Oh, well, we were going to release them anyway." So we don't know what the government's real intentions were but that was where we stood. As I said, they stayed in the consulate for five weeks. We told them they were free to stay until they felt comfortable leaving. We were prepared to organize food for them but there was a committee organized by much of the local leadership of the UDF led by an attorney, Azhar Cachalia. The last time I looked about a year ago Azhar is now a justice of their Supreme Court.

Azhar and I became pretty close as a result of this. He led this committee of support and along with a whole array of other folks and managed to keep these people in good stead within our premises. The situation involved me and others in the consulate and an awful lot of closer relations with individuals of this community, including the three guys who were detained there. And I think it worked both ways. They got some good insights as to our motivations and vice versa. It was a great education which I think served us very well after this event was behind us.

One of our understandings with these three guys was that they were free to stay, they were free to receive visitors but they were not to use our building as a platform for publicity. There would be no press conferences. There would be no individual reporters coming in and they accepted that somewhat grudgingly. There was one incident where

they broke our understanding and a long letter from one of them appeared in a local newspaper. They attracted a lot of visitors. Winnie Mandela was in and out a couple of times. Frank Chikane, who was Desmond Tutu's successor as the secretary general of the South African Council of Churches, and who was already a good contact of mine. And just a whole array of other people who were prominent in the anti-apartheid movement.

Also, I got a lot of phone calls. These are sorted out in two ways. We had an understanding with the embassy from the start that we would manage the presence of these folks in the consulate. The embassy would manage relations with the government in Pretoria, and with our government in Washington, and USIS in Pretoria would handle all press inquiries. So, we were not answering the phones for any press calls to our office and my wife answered all the press calls to our house to tell the callers I was not available. Members of the media who could never remember her name before, suddenly treated her like she was their closest friend, but we were scrupulous in maintaining that separation. Calls that I was taking were calls from Teddy Kennedy, Congressman Donald Payne; from Jesse Jackson and many other prominent Americans calling from the States.

Q: As soon as this event unfolded, the legal people in Washington were drawn in as to what your status was, and the ____.

CHAVEAS: Yes, the embassy handled that stuff. But an aspect of that is that when they came to the consulate, we determined that they were who they claimed to be---and I had already talked to the ambassador about this---I offered them refuge. The first or second night after they came in, the ambassador met with the leaders of the support committee along with me and I think the political counselor may have been there, at a neutral site that was midway between Pretoria and Jo'burg. Frank Chikane and Azhar Cachalia, whom I mentioned earlier, were part of the anti-apartheid representation there. The ambassador informed them that we would provide asylum, which is a different legal category and at least in some respect, clarified the issue of whether or not the South African government could physically intervene in any way.

Meanwhile, the South African government had clearly understood---and this was one of the early indications that we had that things were changing---they clearly understood that it was not in their interest to seize these people, to do anything to try and intervene directly. The situation was eventually resolved when these three guys, in consultations with their support group, came to the conclusion that they were not in any immediate danger of being rearrested. And finally, they took the decision and after being in our place for five weeks, they walked out to an enormous crowd of people on the street. They were not rearrested, with one exception. One of them was rearrested, maybe a week or so later, Mohammed Valli Moosa. When that happened, we knew he was being held in a police station in Jo'burg, so we immediately requested permission for me to visit him. Which I did and within hours after that, he was released again. He eventually went on to become a minister in the Mandela government.

A side note in all of this because this was quite a story, a few days after these guys first arrived, a fourth escapee showed up. His story was pretty much the same as the first

three. He had gotten taken to a hospital because he was supposedly ill and managed to escape and get to us. He clearly had read the story in the press. Anyway, he got to us and we treated him very similarly. The only difference was that he was a very minor figure. He had not been any important organizer but he had some involvement in the resistance out in Soweto. He was a bus driver. Anyway, to their discredit, the other three guys who suspected that he was a plant encouraged him to go out right away. Basically, to take his chances and after some consideration, he did that.

He was quickly arrested but he had a very speedy trial. He was convicted of some misdemeanor which carried a very small fine. I was in court that day. I was prepared to reach into my own pocket but Azhar Cachalia, the lawyer that I mentioned earlier who was defending him, immediately paid his minor fine and he was released. And as far as we know, he was never harassed any further. A couple of days after that, it was maybe one o'clock in the morning---we had a twenty-four-hour presence in the building while these guys were there, Tom Furey, my deputy, was the one in charge that night and he gave me a call and he said, "I think you need to come down to the office. We have another one."

Well, another guy had showed up and Tom didn't let him in. He told him to sit in the lobby right outside of our offices. But this guy didn't have the same kind of story and it didn't ring true to Tom. It didn't ring true to me either when I talked to him. We left him saying, "We can't do anything until we have a chance to talk to Washington, and in Washington time, it was very, very early in the morning still. So, we waited until it was time when we might talk to Washington. I went out to see him again. He had disappeared, he left. Our strong suspicion, which we pretty much confirmed eventually, was that he was a police plant and that it was the intention of the police, basically, to see how many we would take. You know, at what point would they overwhelm us with numbers of people who allegedly had escaped from prison? It was about that time that there was a cartoon in one of the most prominent papers, really funny. I mentioned before that we were in the Kine Centre, a big multiplex. And this cartoon showed two guys in a lineup of people waiting to buy tickets. These two are obviously escaped prisoners. They've got balls and chains on their ankles, and they are trying to get into the Kine Centre. Well, the woman behind the signs, behind the window says, "I'm sorry, but the American Consulate is sold out". Meanwhile, they are advertising that "Cry Freedom" is currently playing at the Kine Centre and that the coming attraction is "Coming to America".

Q: You said this was September, but what year was this? I lost track.

CHAVEAS: This is '88. September of '88, yeah. And as I said earlier when I talked about members of Congress and many others who were expressing an interest in the possibility of change, this particular incident played into the perception that things were changing because of the way the South African government chose to play this. I don't think that six, eight months earlier, this thing would have sorted out in the way that it did but it seemed to be an indication of some kind of change. And, the anti-apartheid community, many of them accepted this as an indication of where we stood with respect to that whole process.

There was another development in here, all about the same time, that I ought to mention. Walter Sisulu had been Mandela's law partner before they went into prison. He was on Robben Island with all of the others. His wife Albertina was a nurse living in Soweto and the embassy had undertaken the mission, some time before, to offer some protection to her in the sense that we paid a lot of attention to her, and the government knew that. So, that responsibility fell to me as soon as I arrived, and I was her regular visitor. I would go out and spend some time with her every few weeks. She lived in her own home. She continued to do her work as a nurse but she was required to report to the police station, I believe it was twice a day. And she couldn't travel any great distance except with special permission. Every so often, she would be told that she could go down and visit her husband. This would happen every so often, usually, with the shortest possible notice. They would try to make it difficult for her to have one of those visits.

But anyway, it was a very fulfilling experience getting to know her as well as I did. And then in late '88, I had the honor of informing her that the ambassador would be coming the following day with a formal invitation for her to visit the White House. George H.W. Bush was inviting her to Washington. I don't recall exactly when that took place but it was in the latter part of the year. She was thrilled, she thought this was a wonderful opportunity. Made it clear that when the ambassador came, she would readily accept, but she said, "You know, I won't be able to go." I said, "Why is that?" And she said, "Well, they will never give me a passport." To which I responded, "We will work on that, maybe we can fix that."

In fact, the embassy did fix that and later, I believe it was after the first of the year, after New Years' in '89, that she came in with an incredible smile on her face and her passport in hand and she got her visa while she was sitting there in my office, and she went off with a delegation headed by Azhar Cachalia, the lawyer I mentioned before. Azhar and I spent a lot of time talking about how they might prepare for that visit and anyway, before her husband was released, she was in Washington talking to George Bush.

Q: Again, kind of demonstrates one of the soft power ways that the United States can reach in and grease the skids.

CHAVEAS: Very definitely, very definitely. And again, this was an indication of movement, of change.

Q: Anyway, you want to break off now? I know you have an appointment.

CHAVEAS: Well, I can go another ten---well, no, I'm sorry, it is later than I thought. Yeah, I am afraid we will have to cut it off there but we did manage to fill up this time with my first year in country.

Q: Yes, I can see this is going to go on.

Q: Today is the 29th of July, we are returning to our conversation with Peter Chaveas.

Q: We were talking to the consul general in Johannesburg.

CHAVEAS: Right.

Q: In 1989, a number of large political events began to change as de Klerk came to head the National Party. Is a constituent post like Jo'burg reporting on those kinds of things, or is that just the embassy?

CHAVEAS: No, we are participating in that, of course. Probably, the single most significant event of 1989 was in October, when all the political prisoners, except Nelson Mandela, were released from prison. That was a particularly significant event that got a lot of attention worldwide. I am sure that in our last session, I talked about my relationship with Albertina Sisulu, the wife of Nelson Mandela's number two. It was in October of that year that her husband came home finally to her.

All of that got an awful lot of international attention. But there was a singular event in Johannesburg that I remember very well, that happened before that. In May of that year, David Webster, a white who was the chief organizer of the tea parties that I talked about in the previous session and whom I knew well and our political officer, Ron Trigg, knew even better was gunned down in the street while he was unpacking groceries from his car. I believe it was on a Saturday morning. And over time, it became very, very clear that he had been shot by the security police. This was an act to eliminate a particularly effective opponent of apartheid. And his funeral at one of the main churches in downtown Johannesburg drew an enormous crowd. And, again, a sign of things changing, the police chose not to interfere. When the funeral was over, virtually everyone in attendance, including Lucille and I and any number of other diplomatic representatives, walked from the church to the cemetery which was several miles away. I don't remember the exact distance, but it was a long distance. And I do remember that Lucille, who wasn't wearing footwear for a long walk, endured it nonetheless and came away with some rather bloody feet. A year earlier an event like this would have likely resulted in far more bloodshed.

And it was hot, and the police presence was very, very light, except that there was a police helicopter hovering over the entire event, from the time we left the church until we arrived at the cemetery, until the crowd dispersed. It was a very, very moving event. And, the way in which the South African authorities reacted to it indicated that they recognized that really, given the changing times, it was not appropriate to interfere in this. And perhaps, it was an acknowledgment that the murder by South African authorities had been a really bad move.

Q: Now, up to now, how have the authorities been handling funerals, gatherings? What was it like to live in the apartheid?

CHAVEAS: Well, in our last session, I recounted a number of gatherings that I went to, either funerals for individuals who had clearly been killed by the South African police, or to the tea parties that I also described. And it was commonplace, not for the police to come in and actually directly intervene in those events. But it was quite common, after the events were over and people were dispersing, for the police to come running through and tear gassing crowds and generally, intimidate people who were participating in those events.

It was also, it was rather surreal to live as we did in an allegedly segregated community. Our home was in one of the better off parts of Johannesburg, and only whites were permitted to live there, allegedly. But the fact was that every household, including our own, had a number of African servants. In many cases, probably in most cases, it simply wasn't feasible for those people to come and go every day. If they lived in a township as they were all supposed to, it was many miles away and public transportation was not readily available. They couldn't afford taxi cabs. And so, in almost all cases including ours, we provided housing for them on our property. And so, we had three black South Africans and a mixed race South African living on our property in this allegedly segregated area. And I think that if you had done a genuine census, in fact I am confident of this, if you had done a genuine census of everyone who lived in that area, you would probably find that the whites who were supposed to be the only ones living there, were actually outnumbered.

Another sign of this was that you always knew payday for the blacks, because they could then go and do their shopping at the local supermarket. And again, they couldn't afford taxi cabs to take them, they didn't have vehicles of their own, so they would go to the supermarket, and they would push home the carts. The supermarkets didn't object to this, this was a good chunk of their business. And the carts would then be abandoned in the streets around the white neighborhood, and periodically, the supermarkets would send around a truck to pick up all these abandoned shopping carts. But again, that was an informal way to do a census of who actually lived in the neighborhood.

Also, and I found this particularly striking when we were first in South Africa, as I have indicated before, I was very frequently in the townships. As was my wife, because she was working as the Self-Help project coordinator for the consulate, and much of their activity, indeed most of our activity, involved various visits to the townships. Early on, our white neighbors would ask us what we thought of their country. And our out was to say, "Well, very interesting". But then, we would follow on by describing what we were observing as we went into the townships. And fundamentally, most of our neighbors simply didn't believe that we were doing what we said we would do, because it was their firm belief that if a white person went into the townships, they would be murdered. And since we were obviously alive, we were also obviously lying about our activities in those areas.

I found this total disconnect between the understanding of many of my neighbors about what was going on in their country and what I knew to actually be happening, to be quite extraordinary. How could these people be so out of tune with what was actually

happening only a number of miles away? But I came to understand it over time. In South Africa of those days, if you were white and you didn't want to know, it was pretty easy to avoid knowing. They were cut off largely from the international media. They only heard what they heard on their official media, which of course, was a very different story. And if they wanted to go about their daily business, or if they wanted to go to one of the wonderful game parks in the country, or they wanted to go to any of the number of very agreeable tourist destinations in the country, they could do so in a fashion that insulated them from the townships. And so, unless you were looking to understand, you didn't have to understand.

And we found, particularly given the kinds of things that we were involved with, we found this really, psychologically very, very difficult. And when on occasions we would leave the country on R&R (rest and recreation), you would get onto an airplane and it would take off and you could feel your body relaxing because, just because you were leaving that really, really strained atmosphere.

Q: Now, you are talking about, they had a very limited public information, understanding of their situation. Would that make it very difficult for your branch PAO [public affairs office] to work? What was he doing?

CHAVEAS: Well, he, and later she, had a range of activities and speakers. I can't say that I remember in great detail what was being done but we had a range of activities which sought to open up the wider world to people who were interested in having it opened up to them. The activity that I remember best was that we had a branch library in Soweto. One of the churches in Soweto, the principal Anglican church, gave us space in one of their buildings to set up a library which did many of the typical things that the U.S. did in its libraries around the world.

It was a very, very popular spot with folks from Soweto, and it was particularly popular with students who would come, not simply to use the resources, the books and whatnot that were available to them there, but we would keep it open late in the evening, it had a more reliable electricity supply than many other places. And hence, it was somewhere where they could come to do their homework. And, it was a safe space. It was a place where the authorities were disinclined to interfere, and I think that played a very important role.

Q: Now, you were talking about the house staff that you had. Were there requirements or laws that they couldn't be on the street at a certain hour of the day and whatnot?

CHAVEAS: Yes, they were. They were quite limited in their movements. And I do remember one time, one of the fellows on the staff, one of our house stewards carved in his spare time. His hobby was whittling. And he made some rather nice little figures. But one evening, and he was under the influence of a bit too much alcohol while he was wielding the knife, he cut his hand badly. We wrapped it up as best we could and I put him in our car and drove him to the nearest hospital. Well, the nearest hospital was white only. Nonetheless, I tried to throw around my position and we went into the emergency

room. Absolutely no one else there except the staff, no patients waiting, no urgent cases, and I was quite insistent that they take care of him. I am going to say he was somewhat embarrassed by this whole thing. He knew what the rules were.

But anyway, I tried to press the case. The staff kind of recessed to another room and I assumed they were on the telephone with some higher authority. But anyway, they eventually came out and insisted that they could not treat him. It certainly wasn't a life or death situation but he did need to be treated. So anyway, I ended up driving him into town to a hospital where he was permitted access. Although it meant waiting for hours and hours, because it was extremely crowded.

Q: Again, de Klerk became the prime minister late in '89.

CHAVEAS: President, yeah.

Q: As you have been suggesting that the atmosphere was changing, however, slowly. Did it begin to pick up with his accession to the presidency?

CHAVEAS: Well, yes, it clearly did. It just so happened that the weekend after he took over that position, we were invited to lunch at the home of Helen Suzman. Helen Suzman was a very well-known anti-apartheid campaigner, known around the world. She was one, for a long time indeed, the only anti-apartheid member of the parliament. She was also a parliamentarian from the area that we lived in, so we got to know her quite well.

Anyway, we were at lunch at Helen's home. It was a small group and one of her guests was a very well-known journalist, Allister Sparks, who was known for being very, very well connected and very, very authoritative on South African politics. And he was beyond gloomy about the decision to make de Klerk the state president. And he went on and on about how this was going to be worse than P.W. Botha. That was just some indication of the skepticism that existed. With good reason, I mean, there were abundant reasons to believe that the South African government was going to put on a show of change and then not really deliver on anything. But it also added to the level of surprise, pleasant surprise, when in fact later that year, all the anti-apartheid prisoners but Mandela were released. Added to this, really, shock when early in the following year, de Klerk made his famous speech to the Parliament.

Q: Just for my background, the prisoners that were released in '89, was that the same prison or there are prisons all over the country?

CHAVEAS: Most of them were on Robben Island. There may have been a few held elsewhere but most of them were being held on Robben Island.

Q: Now, obviously, the United States was very closely watching. You were the ears of policy in South Africa. What vibes were you getting from Washington, guidance about how they were interpreting your reporting?

CHAVEAS: I can't say as I remember that. Likely, it was more the embassy in Pretoria that was engaged in that conversation. I am sure I was aware of it at that time but I am afraid memory fails me on that.

Q: I'm sure from time to time, there was a---all the consul generals were called up to Pretoria to exchange thoughts and whatnot? Any particular atmospherics to come out of those gatherings?

CHAVEAS: Well, we would all come together in one location or another. Sometimes, the embassy would come to us, not so much in Joburg because they were just up the road, but sometimes we would meet in Cape Town. But anyway, we did get together periodically. And I guess, the thing that I remember most about that was what we were hearing from Tex Harris [Franklyn Harris]. Tex was the consul general in Durban---and I see a little smile on your face. Tex was an extraordinary guy, with an extraordinary personality. Let's say, he could always describe things in a very picturesque manner. But he also very much had his thumb on the pulse of what was going on down in the Durban area, which was a real problem because that was where there was a lot of violence and there would be more violence as time went by.

Durban, the area around Durban is where the Zulu are located. It was where chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi was the most prominent political player and he had, in the view of the ANC [African National Congress], been a collaborationist leading up to this time. He was dealing with a lot of division within his own people and, in some cases, encouraging that division. And as I say, Tex was very well clued in on what was going on in that particular corner of the country. Just an added note on that though, because Johannesburg was as close as it was to Pretoria, most weeks, I would go up and attend the country team meetings in Pretoria. So, I had more constant face to face contact with folks up that way.

Q: That gives you an opportunity to comment on how the front office ran the mission and the consulates. Who were your ambassadors and what did you think of them?

CHAVEAS: Well, when I first arrived there, Ed Perkins [Edward Perkins] was the ambassador. Ed was an extraordinary person. I think I can safely say that I have never served under an ambassador where the mission's sense of purpose was so clear. Ed went there initially as Ronald Reagan's ambassador to the country and I remember him describing his meeting with Reagan and a few others, just before he went out to post. Reagan asked him what he hoped to achieve in South Africa, and he said, "I want to go out and see the end of apartheid". Well, it had not ended by the time he left but certainly, in many ways, he contributed to that happening. And probably, no greater contribution was made by him than the fact of his being there and have him being present in all kinds of situations---being present at trials of prominent anti-apartheid activists, of traveling throughout the country, and as a black man insisting on being treated respectfully, and as the representative of a major power.

He added to, I guess, you would say, the consternation of the white authorities by the fact that his wife was Chinese, and he had mixed race children. They had a tendency to show

up on occasions which the South African authorities found rather inconvenient. Then Ed was succeeded by Bill Swing [William Swing], again, an extraordinary guy. Energy beyond belief. He never ever slowed down. Never let up on whatever it was he was working on. I suspect that most senior members of the South African government hated to see him walk through the door, because they knew he was going to press them on something.

And I do remember at one point, he was traveling somewhere down in the Orange Free State. There was an accident, his car went off the road and he ended up in the nearest hospital. Not severely injured but enough that he had to remain in hospital for a bit. And the minister of justice, I think, came in to see him. He was from that area and knew that Ambassador Swing was hospitalized so he went in to see him. And there were all the pleasantries that you would expect if somebody is visiting an injured individual in a hospital. As the minister went to leave, he was already standing and kind of heading towards the door and he says, "Bill, is there anything I could possibly do for you?", thinking, you know, can I make sure something gets delivered to the room or something. Well, Bill drilled down on a bunch of political prisoners that he thought ought to be released immediately.

He was just that kind of guy. Also, his representation bill must have been enormous. There was hardly a night that went by that he didn't have some group of people together at his dinner table to discuss the issues of the day. I had the pleasure of sitting in on several of those. One of his habits was that you could absolutely depend that the day after or two days after you attended one of these events---didn't matter whether you were a South African or an American diplomat, one of the people who worked for him, whatever---you would get a very gracious thank you note for attending his dinner the other night, and for contributing to a very interesting discussion. I love the guy. He was just wonderful, wonderful to work for.

Q: When I was on a promotion panel at one time, our panel noticed that in Africa, there seemed to be a lot of junior officers and a lot of high-ranking officers, and that the mentoring you were looking for wasn't really built into the staffing. Did you have a lot of junior officers?

CHAVEAS: No, none of the officers that worked directly for me that I can recall were junior officers. Ron Trigg had already had, I think, at least two tours by that point. I think I was helpful to him along the way but he was an extraordinarily good officer. He didn't need a whole lot of mentoring. He had particularly close connections to the anti-apartheid community, in no small part, because he chose to live in an apartment in a mixed-race part of Johannesburg, which presented some security challenges along the way but Ron was quite willing to deal with that. And his place became a gathering point for an awful lot of folks who would not have ever ventured out to where most of us on the consulate staff worked. So, he gained some understanding of how people felt and how they lived their lives at a different level in the community.

Q: You are talking about the ambassador traveling. Did you get much travel in your consular district?

CHAVEAS: Oh, yeah. As was my habit everywhere I was posted, I always took every opportunity to get out and around. I traveled, usually just me and my driver, whose name was Elvis. And Elvis loved to dress consistently with his name. Elvis and I would travel together and, you know, we would stop off in some small community somewhere to have lunch and we would go into some local establishment, and we would sit together and have lunch. Sometimes, that was a little disruptive and sometimes it wasn't. But the one time I particularly remember was when I was traveling with my wife because one of the stops along the way was a farm in the Orange Free State which was owned by a woman who wanted to develop a school on her farm for her black workers' children.

She was seeking a Self-Help grant from the consulate, so Lucille wanted to go there and assess this project. So, we went out to the farm and it turned out that this particular woman, something had come up at the very last minute. She wasn't available to take us on a visit but her parents came to guide us through her daughter's farm. And then, they took us over to their home nearby for lunch and we went into the house with Elvis, and they set the table and Elvis sat at the table with us. They could not have been more gracious through the whole lunch.

Then Elvis, as we were getting towards the time when we had to leave, Elvis got up and said, "I want to go out and check something on the car". So, we said, "Sure, go ahead, and we will be along very shortly". Well, he walked out the door and it was as if these two South Africans had been holding their breath the whole time. They were flabbergasted by the whole experience and they said, "We have never had a black man sit at our table ever before in our lives". And they were just so startled by the whole experience. I'm not sure exactly what they took away from it but it really was quite an experience for them.

Q: Now, one of the big opportunities to interact with the public in your context is a July 4 party. You were so close to Pretoria, did you yourself have one or did you combine with Pretoria?

CHAVEAS: As I recall, we did not do the Fourth of July in South Africa until the last year that I was there. I am not sure that we specifically tied this to the situation that existed. I don't remember why, what the reasoning was, but I think probably, it was motivated by the fact that the apartheid situation and where our facilities, our home was located, it was very difficult to have many of the people that we would have wanted to attend, do so. And so, we simply passed on the event. And I don't recall that was any decision that I took. It was something that had been ongoing from before I arrived.

I might add that on the last Fourth of July that we were there, in 1990, by that time, of course, Mandela had been released. And all the other changes were in train, and we did do Fourth of July, and we did it in Soweto.

Q: Now, as a family, did you travel around South Africa very much?

CHAVEAS: Oh, yes, we did. My son who was---let me think, this is 1990, so---he was fourteen years old. Our daughter was sixteen, almost seventeen. Before we went to South Africa, we had been in Lagos and had had repeated experiences in West Africa. West Africa is not where you want to go to see animal life by and large. You go there to see and experience people, much more than the animals. Their animal populations are sparse, except in a few locations. So, when we were still in Lagos and had no hint that we were heading for South Africa, we decided that we should go to Kenya for a vacation, which we did. It was really a life-changing experience for our son who discovered his love of animal life. As a result of this, he is now a U.S. Forest Ranger, and his bachelor's degree is in wildlife management.

So anyway, I relate all of that to say that suddenly, we find ourselves in South Africa which is a paradise for anyone wanting to go to game parks. And Kruger National Park, which is an extraordinary place, is the size of Wales, and is so large that the wildlife varies quite significantly, depending on which end of the park you go to. That was within easy reach of us, in Jo'burg, so we could take a long weekend and go over to Kruger and spend some time there. And then, when we had longer vacations, we would go further south and see some of the game parks down there. So, we were in the game parks an awful lot of the time.

On the other hand, our daughter was not with us the entire time because we found the American school at her level to be inadequate. And so, we sent her home for a year to live with my wife's sister in up-state NY, and she attended school there. She would come home to see us, of course, on vacations, but she was not with us for a good chunk of that time.

Q: I was noticing in the State Department newsletter, you were awarded a Superior Honor Award in 1990. What was that in honor of?

CHAVEAS: I think more than anything else, it was an honor of Bill Swing's enthusiasm and award nomination skills. But, you know, it was a general statement of appreciation for the work that I had done in Johannesburg, and particularly, my work in being a major point of outreach to the anti-apartheid community.

Q: Along those lines, on February 11, 1990, Mandela was released. That would be an electrifying moment.

CHAVEAS: Well, actually, the really electrifying moment was before that, when de Klerk gave his famous speech to the opening of parliament that year.

Q: February 2.

CHAVEAS: Yeah. He got up before the parliament---and remember how I described our luncheon with that reporter who predicted that de Klerk was going to be a disaster? Well, he got up in front of parliament and basically announced the end of apartheid. He

dismantled all of the major elements of apartheid---all the requirements for races to live apart. All of the banning of political activity. He unbanned the African National conference. He just pulled the legs out from under apartheid, and from there, the negotiations for the transition proceeded, which was an enormous shock to everybody.

I particularly remember that on that day, there was a small delegation from the Pan African Congress, which was an even more radical group than the ANC, that was in our office. They were there because they wanted to talk to our political officer about a possible grant for one of their activities. And they were sitting, waiting to go in to see him in our outer office, and I went out and I said to them, "We are all going down to our conference room to watch the president's address to parliament on television, would you care to just come down and join us?". And they said, "Yeah, big deal". But nonetheless, they came along, and they sat there, and they were in utter shock at what he announced, and they said, "He's totally outflanked us. He has done everything that we had been demanding, and more."

And they were in some ways disconsolate, because, you know, what do we do now? Who are we? What is our purpose? So, they were a good example of how shocking this event was to so many parts of the population. And then, not long after that, Mandela is released. And I remember two particular things about the immediate release itself. We were watching it on television, we were up in Johannesburg. And there were cameras set out at the entrance to the prison and all kinds of people waiting to see him come out. The international media was very present. But we were seeing all of it on South African Broadcasting because that was the only television that was locally available. The actual release took place about an hour later than had been announced. And the commentators, you know, if in the United States, a baseball game is going on and there is a rain delay, the commentators have all kinds of stories relevant to the baseball game that they can fill up that gap with.

These commentators were so unfamiliar with Mandela's story, so uninformed, so unprepared to fill that space that they just wandered around talking about things that were utterly irrelevant. There were long periods of silence. And at one point, one of their cameras focused on a standpipe that was alongside the road, in front of the prison. And it was dripping, and they started talking about the dripping standpipe because they couldn't think of anything else to say. And then finally, of course, Mandela came out and there was great jubilation and the media, the international media for the most part, covered that. And then, there was a rush by said media to follow his car because he was going straight from prison to---he wasn't on Robben Island. He had long since been moved off Robben Island, to move him from his final imprisonment spot on to Cape Town where there was an enormous ceremony awaiting him at the city hall.

So, I remember that in particular. And then, another part of it that I remember particularly well---let me preface this by saying, I have the greatest admiration for Jesse Jackson. I thought he was a, and still is, a very committed and tireless campaigner for the cause of African Americans and for black and downtrodden people throughout the world. He had been very much a voice in opposition to apartheid in South Africa. However, the South

African government did not announce the actual release date for Mandela until the last possible moment, although it was quite clear that that date was imminent. And there were all kinds of people from outside the country who were seeking to pre-position themselves so that they could be in some kind of proximity to Mandela when this happened.

It was very clear that Jesse Jackson wanted to be at the top of that list. So, one day---this is a week or a couple of weeks before Jackson is scheduled to arrive. He was not coming in any official capacity. We were not, technically, involved in his trip to South Africa. But I got a call from Frank Chikane. Frank Chikane was a Christian minister who was the head of the South African Council of Churches. Somebody I knew quite well. And Frank calls me up and he says, "I need your help with a serious problem. As you probably know, Reverend Jackson is coming in the expectation of Nelson Mandela's release. We know that the U.S. government has nothing to do with this". And I knew from previous conversations that the South African Council of Churches was not all that happy about being his host at this particular time, but they understood the optics and the politics involved if they declined to be his host.

So, the visit was going ahead with him as the guest of the South African Council of Churches. He was coming to Joburg first, and Frank said, "We need your help. There are very credible threats against the life of Reverend Jackson, and we are not in any position to provide the security that he would need. The only ones in South Africa that could do that would be the security police and as you fully understand, we can't deal with the security police. Can you help us?". So, I said, we will certainly see what we can do. I got in touch with the embassy in Pretoria and it was agreed that we would try to be of assistance.

And what resulted from that was that, at least initially, there was a meeting involving the security police and me in our conference room. There was also a representative from the foreign ministry there. And then, there was another meeting set up and that was a meeting between me and the same Foreign Ministry representative and representatives of the South African Council of Churches. It just so happened that the two meetings took place at the same time in the same space. And during the meeting, the South African police spoke only to me, and the South African Council of Churches spoke only to me. They didn't speak to each other. But obviously, they were in the same room and they could hear what each other was saying.

So, that led to some level of cooperation, even though nobody admitted that it was going on in that fashion. That was a good starter but as the time for the visit became closer, and there was a need for a lot of detailed discussions, it became obvious that this was not going to work. And then, on top of that, Reverend Jackson's advance people arrived, and they were extraordinarily obnoxious, to the point where the South African Council of Churches and the security police said, "We can work together on this one". Anyway, it all panned out quite well while he was in the Johannesburg area. He was given appropriate protection by the South African authorities and the visit proceeded properly.

But then, he went down to Cape Town and I was never fully conversant with what went on down there. But he had different hosts down there. It wasn't the South African Council of Churches. And somehow, the situation got out of control and Reverend Jackson, who very, very much wanted to be standing up on that balcony next to Nelson Mandela when he came out to speak, insisted that his car be driven into a particular location. And apparently, for reasons I wasn't clear on, the crowd which had gathered thought that he was Mandela, that it was Mandela in this car. And there was not adequate security around the car to deal with the fact that the crowd became so exuberant that they actually ripped the doors off of the car in their effort to touch Mandela. Well, it wasn't Mandela. And anyways, Reverend Jackson, I was told by some, was fairly lucky to escape without being badly injured. Anyway, he did manage ultimately to be standing next to Mandela when he gave his first speech to the general public on the balcony of city hall in Cape Town.

Q: Almost four weeks later, Secretary Baker comes to South Africa, goes to Cape Town, Joburg and Soweto. How much advance was there on that trip?

CHAVEAS: Well, there is another event that I've got to recount that happens before that. I had the great, great honor of meeting Nelson Mandela three times. Two of those times were while I was AF/S [Office of Southern African Affairs] director later on, but the first time was really the most memorable. And it was when---oh, I guess it was maybe a week or so after his release---he returned to his home in Soweto. And I had the pleasure, along with a quarter of a million other people, of meeting him in the stadium in Soweto. The stadium in Soweto is a big horseshoe-shaped affair, and it has what I guess we would refer to as some executive boxes.

When I arrived for the event, I was ushered up into one of those executive boxes, and I found myself sitting up there with two lawyers whom I knew very well. One was a fella named George Bizos. George had been Mandela's lead attorney for years and years, and he was also rather a gourmet and loved to spend the U.S. government's representative money, as he and I would have some fairly regular lunches and he knew all of the best restaurants in Jo'burg. The other lawyer that I knew was a guy named Arthur Chaskalson. Arthur also had been involved much of the time as an attorney for Mandela and his fellow prisoners, but he also was to be famous as, in essence, the James Madison of the first post-apartheid South African constitution. He was a principal author of that document. But that, of course, had not transpired yet.

Anyway, I was sitting up with these gentlemen and several other people, including some other diplomatic colleagues, and Mandela made his entrance. And again, there were a quarter of a million people packed into the stands or standing out in the infield, and Mandela came in, in a big open convertible and they drove him around the track a couple of times. And the crowd was just going wild. The exuberance was beyond belief. And two particular things stood out in my mind. First, at one point, I glanced up towards the open end of the horseshoe and there immediately, that scene from *Apocalypse Now*, with all of the helicopters bearing down to Wagner in the background came to mind because every news institution in the world, I swear, had a helicopter flying up there. I don't know

how they managed to deconflict but there was just this mass of helicopters up there, trying to cover this event.

And then, the other thing that was more telling was the message that came out of it about Mandela as a political player, and his wisdom as a political player. He, after going around the stadium a couple of times, pulled up to this podium and stage that had been set up at one end of the stadium, and he started to get out of the car but he observed, you know, you can see him surveying who was up on that stage and he turned to one of his deputies, and told him to get on the public address system. And the fellow got on the public address system, and he said, "Would Arthur Chaskalson and George Bizos, please come down and join Madiba on the stage?"

Mandela had looked at the participants that were up there, the VIPs [very important persons] that were to be with him, and they were all black. And this was not the South Africa that he had spent all those years in prison for. He wanted a non-racial representation, and so, these two particular individuals went down and joined him. Many people will remember the movie *Invictus*, in which Mandela became one of the biggest and most public fans of the South African cricket team, much to the consternation of the ANC leadership, at least initially, because rugby---and this was the Rugby World Cup being held in South Africa---rugby was an Afrikaner sport.

Sport, like everything else in South Africa, was segregated, and this was the sport of the enemy. But he insisted on being supportive of them and in so doing, sent a tremendous positive message to the broader population. And, I don't know how much of that movie was Hollywood and how much of it was true but I know that a good deal of it was true. And it was certainly consistent with the way he tried to conduct politics after his release. So, then Secretary Baker comes and---

Q: How quickly was that set up?

CHAVEAS: Well, it was done pretty quickly, and obviously, one of the desires of the Secretary was to meet with Mandela quickly after his release. But as it panned out, Mandela was not in South Africa at the time of the visit. He did not meet Mandela, he would eventually meet Mandela in Washington, but he did not during that visit. It just proved impossible to coordinate a time when the Secretary was available and Mandela was available in South Africa. I don't remember where Mandela was, he may have been at the Davos conference because he was a very early invitee to the Davos conference, but I'm not sure that is the right timing.

Anyway, Secretary Baker did come, he came first to Johannesburg. He stayed in the hotel that was located right across the street from our offices. We organized a breakfast for him with a very diverse community of anti-apartheid activists in Soweto, in the library, where USIS had its set up. And because the kitchen that was out there was very, very limited, my wife moved half of our kitchen out to Soweto so that a meal could be prepared for the Secretary. And it was a huge success. I mean, he really got an opportunity to talk with these people. It was a mixed race gathering. They were tremendously appreciative, not

just of the conversation, but of the fact that he chose to come to see them where they lived and worked.

I must, however, add a bit of a sour note about which I still feel great disappointment. Years later, now a private citizen, Baker was invited to Stuttgart as the guest of the city of Stuttgart. And he had a speaking engagement, and as part of that, the city government of Stuttgart held a dinner for him. I was the political advisor at EUCOM [United States European Command] at that point, and I was amongst the invitees along with my wife. I, however, was out of town at that time but my wife went alone. And before the event, he was taken around and introduced to the various guests and he was introduced to my wife. They said, "This is Mrs. Chaveas, she's the wife of our political advisor, Ambassador Chaveas. He is out of town right now". And my wife, you know, greeted him then. He immediately asked her where and when was your husband ambassador. This was after I had been ambassador in Malawi. And he paused briefly, focused on the dates and said, "Oh, he was not one of ours", and turned tail on her and walked away. And, you know, she was stunned by this. The obvious response would have been, we were career officers. We served all presidents. But in that particular case, I was the ambassador of a Democratic president. I just thought it reflected very, very badly on Baker.

But anyway, back to South Africa. We did manage to have this breakfast, and then we went to the home of Walter Sisulu and his wife, Albertina. I've talked at length about her previously. And there they were in their very humble place, there were children running in and out. But Sisulu was the highest ranking of the political prisoners that had been released in Mandela's absence, and they had a very good conversation and the Secretary certainly seemed to appreciate that very much. And then subsequently, he went on to a stop in Cape Town.

Q: Now, secretarial visits require quite a bit of preliminary work. Normally, the executive secretariat sends out somebody a few days before to make sure that all arrangements, agenda and whatnot are in place. Is that the experience you had?

CHAVEAS: Well, we did have advance people but this was something that happened on, as you mentioned, on pretty short notice, so, we were spared some of that. And I think the only advanced people that I recall were there the day before the event and that worked out just fine.

Q: Now, sometimes, external events also impact your environment. And I am going back to the fall of 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Was there any reverberation in your environment to that particular event?

CHAVEAS: Yes, and I don't think it is very widely recognized. I'm not sure that we recognized its full importance at that time. But there was a hard core amongst Afrikaner leadership that was sincerely of the belief for quite some time before all of these events we are just talking about now, that the Soviet Union was behind an international conspiracy to destroy them. And, of course, the Soviets were quite active in supporting

various liberation movements around the continent, including the ANC, so, there was credibility to that.

And they also came to believe over time, particularly after the Congress overrode Reagan's veto of sanctions against South Africa, that we were joining in that conspiracy. And so, in this circle within the Afrikaner leadership, that was a real barrier to change. Well, when that enemy suddenly disintegrated, that excuse, if you will, for continuing to resist change, disappeared. I think that was not a widely recognized factor behind the eventual success of the negotiating process.

Q: Well, another thing I want to touch on, and you've mentioned that before, you are talking about grants that the consulate could give out to various local actors. What program was that? Who ran it? Where were the funds from?

CHAVEAS: Well, it was AID [United States Agency for International Development] money. But it was, the general practice was for it to be turned over to someone in the State Department for distribution as small grants, and this was not just an activity in South Africa. For instance, I have been very, very involved with that as far back as my time in Freetown. And this was a means of getting small amounts of money, often no more than a couple of thousand dollars, out to community organizations for any variety of projects. Often, they would help build a school room or to provide some kind of supplies for a local health clinic or a school, or there were community gardening projects that received funding from time to time.

As I said, my wife Lucille was in charge of the program in Johannesburg for a good part of the time that we were there, which required somewhat convoluted arrangements because I couldn't be your supervisor in that capacity. I couldn't be your supervisor in any capacity but anyway, she answered directly to our political officer. And for that purpose, her reviewing officer was another officer up in Pretoria. But anyway, she was particularly involved and I think she was particularly innovative in some of the things that she did, sometimes to the consternation of the review committee in Pretoria that had to bless all of these things before they were finalized.

But for instance, she helped to finance a portable dance stage for a dance group that had developed in Soweto, so that they could take their performances to different communities around the Johannesburg area. Took a lot of convincing to get that through the committee. She also, there was a group, a budding musical group in Soweto called the Soweto Strings. I think the finance went to some new instruments for them. Well, the Soweto strings went on to become internationally known. They put out at least two CDs that I am aware of and developed quite an international audience. I don't know if they are still in existence, but anyway, we, the U.S. government, helped to finance one of their earliest steps forward, and my wife was personally involved in that.

Q: That's a great illustration of what the United States can do in even this kind of very difficult environment.

CHAVEAS: Indeed.

Q: We have spent a lot of time in Johannesburg. Do you have anything else you think we've missed?

CHAVEAS: No, there are a million things I could add but just in summation, I would say that of all the time that I spent in the Foreign Service, I have never been involved with issues as engaging, both professionally and personally, as those that I was involved with with respect to South Africa. And that goes not just for the time that I spent in South Africa itself as CG [consul general] in Jo'burg, but also the time I would eventually spend in the Department as AF/S director.

Q: Do you want to break it off now? How is your schedule?

CHAVEAS: I could go in well, until noon.

Q: Okay, well, then let's keep going because your next assignment is Senior Seminar.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: It is a very attractive handshake for any officer. How did this come about?

CHAVEAS: Well, am I correct in thinking you did that as well along the way?

Q: No, you and I were earlier.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, right. In the econ commercial course. Well, it came about principally because at this time, Ed Perkins is the Director General. When I expressed an interest in the Senior Seminar, Ed said "Absolutely, it will happen". And it did, and I consider myself extremely lucky to have done that. I don't remember exactly when the Senior Seminar was ultimately canceled, but it didn't survive too many years beyond the time that I was there. But just as an indication of how significant I found that, it was only about two months ago that I attended a reunion of our group, up at one of our member's homes in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. We had seven or eight members there from amongst the thirty who gathered for that particular event, and this was by no means unique. There have been all kinds of gatherings like that to bring together this group of people who spent a year with each other, traveling together, sitting in classes together, having all kinds of exciting conversations together. It was really, very meaningful and I value it to this day. And as I say, I remain in close contact with several of the folks with whom I participated in that program.

I should note that one of the first things that I did when I got back to Washington after that was go in and see Jeff Davidow, who was at that time the senior DAS [deputy assistant secretary] in the African Bureau, and the guy who handled most of the personnel work for the Bureau at that level. I had a sit down about my future and he said, "What would you like to do after your year in the Senior Seminar?". And I said, "I would really

like to be AF/S director”, and he said, “Absolutely, you'll have our full support”. That didn't go a hundred percent smoothly but ultimately, in the end, that is exactly how it worked out.

Q: Can you give us an impression that you had at first, as to what the Senior Seminar was, and then how it unfolded?

CHAVEAS: Well, two things in particular, come to mind. Number one, the Senior Seminar basically said to the group of us, “You are individuals who have been identified for this program because you either have just assumed senior positions in your respective services, or you are clearly about to do so. You have spent your careers focused principally on things that are happening outside the United States, and you need to be brought back and re-grounded in what it is you represent. What is America today all about? What are you working on behalf of, as you go on to the senior positions in whatever service it may have been”. And so, the course involved an awful lot of focus on domestic issues, and we spent an awful lot of time traveling around the United States”.

There was also international travel involved but the principal focus was on things inside the country. The other thing that I got the most out of during this year was that it was not all State Department people. There were thirty of us, but only fifteen of us were drawn from either the State Department or from USIS, which still existed back then. There were representatives from the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], the NSA [National Security Agency], the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. And what I found most interesting was that there was a representative from each of the military services including the Coast Guard and the National Guard Bureau. And through those contacts, I certainly learned an enormous amount about how our military plays in our international activities and how we can be collaborative with each other. How they are an asset to what we do in diplomacy, and how they develop their own people. We spent a couple of days in each case, actually visiting units of the different services, very, very enlightening experiences.

Q: Now, some of the domestic travel, I assume, covered various sectors of the United States. But was this itinerary set up by you or the administrators of the seminar?

CHAVEAS: It was set up by the administrators, with some input from us. But to start off, only a couple of weeks after we entered the program, the first trip was to Alaska. And what a tremendous experience because not only were we in Alaska and this extraordinarily interesting part of the country, but because we had military representatives in our group, we had access to military support. And so, we weren't tied to the limitations of commercial travel and so we got to both ends of the pipeline, we flew over the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve. We got out to the Aleutian Islands and saw something of the fishing industry that was going on out there. We got to Nome, we were in Fairbanks. We started out in Juneau, in the capital, and met with the governor. And the central theme of the visit was the tension, which we still see today in spades, the tension between economic development and preservation of natural resources. And, golly, what an education.

Q: Did you get into the Pacific Northwest?

CHAVEAS: I'm trying to remember. I think we did have a trip up there. I can't remember that one.

Q: Now, in these trips, was it the whole class of thirty?

CHAVEAS: Yes, yeah. We went as a group. Sometimes, for specific activities, we would break up into smaller groups but yeah, we all went together, which was a great part of it. We just always had those colleagues to bounce ideas off about whatever it was you were seeing or hearing.

Q: I presume the desert southwest was on your itinerary sometime?

CHAVEAS: Well, we made a couple of trips which related to immigration and to trade with Mexico. We were not actually in any of the four southwest states as I recall but we were in southern California. When we were in southern California, that included a stop at the Navy SEAL training facility near San Diego. It involved going out on a night patrol with Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS] along the border south of San Diego, involved going over to Tijuana and talking to the folks on the staff of our consulate down there. We would also make a visit along the way to Monterey to meet with the staff there, and there was a visit to Dallas as well to talk to people, principally about trade issues with Mexico. And then, in one of our international visits, we would later go on down to Mexico City to talk about many of the same issues, with both Mexicans and our country team.

Q: I read at some point that there was also a night ride with the local cops in Baltimore. Did some of this travel get that specific?

CHAVEAS: You know, we were looking along the way at policing issues, amongst other things. We particularly looked into the drug issue. Part of that included a night ride for each one of us with an individual member of the Baltimore Police Department. And I remember, one of the first calls that this particular officer got while I was with him, was for a domestic abuse item. Somebody had been beaten and so we went to this location. We got out of the car and started walking towards the house, and he stopped me, and he said, "Before we go in there, I want to show you how to do the two-step". What are we going to do, dance?.

So he shows me the two-step. When you go in there, keep your feet moving at all times, you know, standing in place, keep your feet moving. Because this house was infested with cockroaches. One of the inhabitants was nursing a pretty significant wound to his head. There had been a domestic dispute and the officer dealt with all of that, as best he could. Called in some medical assistance as well, satisfied himself that there was no immediate threat of continuing violence. But it was quite an insight into both, how he

spent an awful lot of his time because this was not a unique experience for him and also into the living conditions in which some of our citizens have to survive.

I also remember that very late in the ride, we were getting close to the time to go back to headquarters, he gets a call to the effect that there is a young man on a bicycle riding through a particular commercial district with a gun in hand. And so, we go screaming off to this location. By the time we got there, I swear, half the Baltimore police force must have been there. There were more flashing lights than I have ever seen in my life, and they had the situation under control. It was some ten or twelve-year-old who was in fact riding around with a plastic gun, playing I don't know, cops and robbers with a friend or something. It was a totally innocuous event. And fortunately, no one was too quick on the draw, as we have seen in a number of incidents more recently. But I was just, more than anything else, struck by the massiveness of the response to an incident like that.

Q: Did you have any opportunities to hit rural Midwest issues?

CHAVEAS: Unfortunately, not. One of the visits that was scheduled was when we were going to go to Indiana as I recall, and each of us was going to spend a night on a working farm. I really looked forward to that visit, particularly given my agricultural experience as a Peace Corps volunteer! Unfortunately, that was one of the years in which Congress came so close to shutting down the government, and the organizers were compelled to shut down that particular visit. Even though the government did get funded in that case, it was just being cut too close. So, we missed out on that experience, and I regretted that very much.

Q: Now, you are saying one of the foreign trips was to Mexico?

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: Was there any other continent touched?

CHAVEAS: Well, we did have one, much more international trip and this is one where we had some input in advance. This was the last bit of travel that we did and so, there was plenty of time for all of us to express an opinion about what we wanted to prioritize. And what we did is we went to the Soviet Union, which of course, by this time---this is 1991---is on its last legs. We wanted to go out and see what was going on first-hand. Not only did we want to do the usual Moscow, Leningrad visits---it was still Leningrad at that time---but we decided we wanted to visit one of the republics. And so, we chose to make a trip to Georgia along the way.

Well, as I said, we started out in Moscow and of course, had our time with folks at the embassy. We also met with various Russian officials, I can't say that anything stood out to me in those particular meetings, but we did then go up to Leningrad and one of our meetings was with the then mayor of Leningrad who was very much an advocate for Perestroika, he was very much a Gorbachev man. And there was a collection of officials of his city government sitting in a row behind him against a wall. None of them ever

spoke, but I mentioned the reunion we had recently of some of our colleagues and comparing notes on some of our experiences, and we emerged from that conversation quite confident that one of those hangers on against the back wall was Putin.

So, we met him, but we didn't meet him. The other thing about Leningrad that particularly struck me, as you undoubtedly know, Leningrad is renowned for its beautiful pre-revolution era buildings, particularly the Hermitage which has this unbelievable art collection in it. We had time to wander the streets and just see what things were like. And again, these were the dying days of the Soviet Union, resources were limited. I had been to Leningrad as a junior year abroad student back in 1966 and had been able to see Leningrad in its glory. I mean, it was beautiful back then. Well, by the time we went there with the Senior Seminar, there were bits and pieces of these beautiful facades falling off the fronts of buildings and into the sidewalks and streets. And the way that they were dealing with that was not to do maintenance work, but simply they were taping off those areas to keep pedestrians away from the falling materials and just leaving it there.

Hopefully, it remained there long enough to be recovered and restored to the buildings once things became rather more stable under a Russian government, and I know from a distance that much of that has been restored, but it just painted a picture of how really difficult the circumstances were in the last days of the Soviet Union. And then, really enlightening was the trip to Georgia but I see our time is running out and maybe that's a good point at which to stop and pick it up with the visit to Georgia later time?

Q: OK, because one thing I wanted to ask you is how did your military colleagues in the group respond to Leningrad, respond to this decline? So anyway, let's see.

Q: It is August 4, we are returning to our conversation with Ambassador Chavez.

CHAVEAS: Chaveas.

Q: Chaveas. Why do I keep saying---

CHAVEAS: Chaveas.

Q: Chaveas. The emphasis is on the---

CHAVEAS: Many people want to say Chavez, and in fact, that is as we have discussed, that is the way it ought to be except my grandfather lied to us a lot.

Q: Whoever you are. When we last met, you were in the Senior Seminar and you had suggested when we broke off that there are a couple more points you wanted to make about that adventure?

CHAVEAS: Yeah. Well, two, I would guess. One, I'll just mention in passing because it was in your notes from the last time and I had forgotten about it. We paid a visit to the naval shipyard in Moscow and one of the most modern ships that the Soviets had at that time was docked there, going through its final outfitting before it went to sea. We did not get aboard it, but we got all around it, and were told about it. And at one point, various of us were pulling out cameras and taking pictures, and initially, our Soviet guide who was a senior naval officer said, "No, no, no, no, no pictures". And then he hesitated a bit and he said, "Ah, you folks have all those pictures from aerial surveillance anyway. Go ahead and take pictures". It was an interesting comment on the state of affairs at that time.

But an even more interesting part of this was that as this trip was being developed, one of the things that we very much wanted included in the itinerary was a trip to one of the republics. Because we knew in the Soviet Union, there were an awful lot of demands being made by the outlying republics for greater autonomy and we wanted to observe firsthand how that was developing. So, we decided to go to Georgia and we flew down. We were on a U.S. official plane, the United States of America plastered across the side of it in big letters.

And we landed early in the day, in the capital, and to greet us at the bottom of the stairs was the chief of protocol of Georgia. And we walked down and the senior representative of FSI [Foreign Service Institute] who was with us, Ambassador---I am forgetting that name now. What's that?

Q: Brandon?

CHAVEAS: Brandon Grove. He was the first one down and the chief of protocol---I was maybe four or five places behind him---the chief protocol said, "The prime minister of the republic is here to greet you. Who are you?" And Grove attempted to explain what the Senior Seminar was all about. It was clear that just went right by the chief of protocol. He did not comprehend what we were talking about. But that didn't really matter. The idea was that there were some fairly senior people from the United States, and he seemed to particularly like the fact that our organization's name included the word senior, and we arrived on a big plane that said in bold letters, "THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" across it. And there was no question, but they saw this as some degree of recognition for their desire for greater autonomy.

And so, we were greeted in the lounge by the prime minister and then each pair of us was shuttled out to our own individual limousine. These big, black, Russian-made, Soviet-made cars---boats, really---and we were driven into town in a great parade. Every car had the stars and stripes and the flag of Georgia on the front of it. And these kinds of movements took place several times while we were there. Every time it was clear that we were being driven through the most populous parts of the town, not on a direct route to wherever it was we were going, but wherever we would be seen the most. They were milking our presence there for everything they could get.

Among the visits that we had there was one with the head of the government, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. We had a session with him and then we were given the opportunity to ask questions after he gave a little spiel about their country. We knew in advance that this man was not a great democrat and certainly not a respecter of human rights. Several of us, myself included, I think Johnnie Carson also stood up and asked some fairly pointed questions about human rights. And the answers that we got were, I don't remember the exact answers, but I do remember that they were hardly satisfactory.

We were also feted in various ways. We quickly learned that a dinner with anyone of prominence in Georgia involved copious quantities of wonderful food, and an awful lot of alcoholic beverages which were presented in such a way that it was pretty darn difficult to turn them away. The first night, we had dinner in the city. The second night, we were driven out of town. We were all on the same bus, driven out to a beautiful *dacha* (country house), and I remember distinctly that as we were pulling in---I was in the window seat---to unload, they had to take us behind the building. As we went around that corner, I was looking out the window and there were all these guys standing around with sawed off shotguns strapped around their backs. And my first thought was, now I don't need to make a trip to Sicily.

I mean, this looked so much like our image from *The Godfather* and from all kinds of Mafia movies. And then, we went inside. There were various toasts, including one response to a Georgian toast by our Air Force representative, whose politics were particularly conservative, who responded with a toast to the death of communism. After the dinner, or at least as the dinner was approaching its end, it was announced that we needed to dance. There wasn't a woman in the place, except for the three members of the Senior Seminar who were women. But that didn't hinder the Georgians at all, they were quite happy to dance with other men. In the midst of all of this, one of the bodyguards was dancing with some members of our class. Again, I think it was Johnnie Carson, I am not sure about that.

But anyway, this guy's Glock or similar armament drops out on the floor from where he had been cashing it in his belt. Fortunately, it did not go off, but that gives you a certain sense of the aura of some parts of it. The following morning, we left early, and quite early, as a matter of fact. We arrived at the airport to discover that there was going to be a delay because the Georgian government had given each of us two cases of Georgian wine. And the loadmaster on our plane was trying to figure out how to load this in such a way that we could take off, because obviously, we couldn't reject this gift. And yet, it added enormously to the weight that we were carrying.

Anyway, the loadmaster worked some miracles, and we flew home. And we dealt with customs upon arrival. We landed at Andrews [Andrews Air Force Base] and they were very understanding of the circumstances under which we had acquired all of this wine. We were left to take it home, where each and every one of us discovered that it was absolutely wretched and eventually poured all of it down many drains across suburban Washington. But it was a very enlightening visit, both about the local culture but also

about how hungry these people were for some kind of separation from the Soviet Union. And of course, it was not that long before that happened.

Q: Now, your delegation, as you said, included a number of representatives from the Armed Forces as they went through the Naval Yard and some other things even in the States. Were they surprised or interested or what was their reaction to some of these things?

CHAVEAS: Well, I think, their chief reaction was, as I think it was for most of us, was of the obvious decline of this country which had been an adversary as long as we could remember. Not just during our careers but growing up. We always had the Soviet Union in the back of our minds, or not so much in the back, as this menace. And not to downplay the degree to which they were at one time a great menace, they clearly were not any longer. Both because attitudes there had shifted, but also that their economy, their military posture, their unity, were clearly in sharp deterioration.

Q: Now, you are suggesting you went straight from Georgia to Washington, but actually, didn't you make a couple of stops in Europe?

CHAVEAS: Well, I am pretty sure we went straight home from Georgia, but we had made some earlier stops. I think those were before. I may be wrong about that but the tale of the wine is so strong in my memory. Your notes say that we went to Brussels during this trip. I must admit I have no memory of that but I don't doubt it. I do remember us stopping, I believe in Warsaw, and I know we made a stop in Budapest. I can't remember very much about those except being terribly impressed by the many government buildings in Budapest that we were shown through. Extraordinary buildings with great, great quantities of gold leaf. I have been back to Budapest once since then and it is still a glorious city from that standpoint.

Q: Anyway, your next---now, in the Senior Seminar, did you have to write a paper or some sort of final evaluation?

CHAVEAS: We were offered the opportunity to do a written project starting early on. When the winner of the competition for Best Paper was announced, I think my reaction was the same as most of my colleagues, "Oh my gosh, we had that offer". All of us had forgotten about it. There were only a handful that actually went through the exercise. Wayne Leininger was chosen as the winner but most of us never did that. What we did do though was that the month of February during the Senior Seminar was a month during which we didn't have any structured program. Each of us was expected to pick a subject that we wanted to learn more about, usually focusing on some domestic issue.

We were given the time to work on it, but also, given some additional support for travel if what we wanted to do involved some travel. I had been particularly impressed by the fellow who had spoken to us a month or two before that, from the District of Columbia's Office of Drug Response. This was the office that was more than anything else, involved in education and treatment with respect to the drug issue. And so, I was in contact with

him and said I had this month to pursue some subjects that I was particularly interested in, and I asked if I might intern in his office for a month.

That aspect of it was a great learning opportunity except that it was constrained somewhat by the fact that there was all kinds of leadership turmoil in the organization at that time, and the fellow that I had reached out to and who had agreed to work with me, was fired very shortly after I got there. He was eventually rehired before I left. It ended up being a short time that he was gone but it was quite enough to disrupt what I was trying to achieve while I was there, and the work that he asked me to do for him. Nonetheless, I learned an awful lot about the limitations of our drug treatment capacity in this country. And I have come to be firmly of the belief that the “War on Drugs” is one of the most wasteful and counterproductive activities of the U.S. government that we have ever been involved in.

A terrible waste of resources with very little effect, when the money should have been much better spent on providing more education and treatment, and spending less time penalizing use of drugs, some of which---certainly not all of which---but some of which are either not harmful at all or far less harmful than we advertise them as. We should be more concentrated on addressing the ones that really are harmful. But mostly, we should be much more focused on treatment for those people who need it, and for education that does not demonize the issue, but rather, provides people with real, accurate information.

I also during that period, making use of some of the travel funds that were involved, I spent a couple of days down in Atlanta. Atlanta was amongst other things, the headquarters of the D.A.R.E (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program, which was one, I believe still is, one of the major programs for reaching out to high school and other young people educationally, although I think their message at that time was in part the wrong one. I also spent some time with some senior Atlanta police officials, which added quite a bit to my understanding.

At the end of this whole event or this whole month, each one of us gave an oral presentation to our classmates about what we had done and what kind of conclusions we had come up with. Unfortunately, the day that I was scheduled to give mine, I was dealing with my own drug problem. I had for some time had a back injury that would flare up once in a while. And I had some pretty hefty painkillers that I would take when that happened. It just so happened that the night before I was to present, I had a flare up and had to take those painkillers. And so, when I got up to make my presentation---I really should have asked for a postponement---but rather, I think I sounded a little dopey to my colleagues. But as they say, it is what it is.

Q: Now, the Senior Seminar has always had a very good reputation. Let me ask you, what do you think you got out of it, and what have we lost now that it is no longer in the budget?

CHAVEAS: Well, I got exposure to all kinds of things that I described, particularly the chance to catch up on a lot of domestic issues that I was vaguely aware of but, being

overseas or constantly focused on international issues, I wasn't as aware of as I should have been. So, that was really valuable. The other big thing was the opportunity to interact with this very varied group of people, much more intensely than I ever would have in the daily course of doing my business.

And as I mentioned earlier on, I remained close with a number of them. We get together with some regularity or communicate in other ways. I would say more than anything else, my exposure to the military folks in this group was extremely helpful to me, continues to be and as we will see, it certainly influenced in several ways the future course of my career.

Q: Now, when you went to the Senior Seminar, did you already have an ongoing assignment to the Africa Bureau?

CHAVEAS: I think I mentioned this earlier on. When I first got back from Jo'burg, I went in to see Jeff Davidow, the senior DAS in AF and we talked about what I wanted to do after this year, and agreed that I would be the AF/S director. Several months later, I got a call from Jeff to say there was a problem. Robert Perito, who was the AF/S director at that time, wanted to stay on for another year and Hank Cohen [Herman Jay Cohen], the assistant secretary, was supportive of that. Would I be interested in being director for East Africa, another job that was opening up at the same time?

I wasn't fully enthusiastic about that for two reasons. I knew something of Southern Africa, and Southern Africa and the AF/S office had really "where it was at" because we always had Southern Africa issues that were on the front burner. And, I had never served in East Africa. So, I welcomed it as an educational opportunity, but I would have preferred to serve as office director in some area of the world where I already had some experience. Anyway, I proceeded on the assumption that East Africa was what it was going to be.

I got a call sometime later from personnel. I was asked if I still wanted to be AF/S director, and I said, "Yeah, but you know, I had come to this understanding with the front office in AF, and I was content with that". And they said, "Oh no, that's not the way it works. Perito had not asked to extend early enough". So, this was an open competition and he had to be a competitor just like me, for the job. And the personnel said, "You are the better qualified officer at this time for that position". And I said, "Okay, well, if that is the way it is, that is the way it is, and I am happy with that".

And AF was informed of that, and I didn't get any blowback from them at all. They accepted that. I waited a few weeks, I didn't want to jump in right away and call Bob and say, "Hey, I am going to be succeeding you", but I did in time, say, "You know, I would welcome the opportunity to get together for lunch or coffee or something, and talk a bit about what is on the agenda". Bob was shell-shocked. He had never been told what had transpired. He didn't fight it. He recognized that the process was the appropriate one but it left him hanging and feeling like he had been stabbed in the back by the Bureau because no one had ever bothered to tell him what was happening. Anyway, he landed on his feet.

He had a much stronger background in Soviet Affairs and he moved quite easily into a good position over there.

Q: So, you started with AF/S in June of 1991. As you said, you already had considerable background in the issues. But what indication did you get from the front office that should be your priorities?

CHAVEAS: Well, South Africa was always the front burner issue. This transition, doing whatever we could to encourage the process, doing whatever we could to discourage the growing violence that was an impediment to the negotiating process, was just absolutely "the issue". What followed closely behind that issue were the two former Portuguese colonies, Angola, and Mozambique. Angola in particular was a really messy, messy issue. Here, I had the advantage of having Richard Roth as one of my deputies. Richard had already been in the office for a year. He had been on this issue, he was a Portuguese speaker, which was an obvious asset there. And he knew the issue backwards and forwards.

I guess, maybe this is a good point for me to interject a note about how I chose to pursue my career---not why I chose to get into the Foreign Service but how once in it, I chose to pursue it. As I mentioned much earlier on, when I finished my first assignment in Freetown, I had an onward assignment as a watch officer. And I don't know what it is like now, but back in those days, to get an assignment to that position in the ops center early in your career was an indication that you were being recognized as a good performer up to that point.

I knew that it would be a place where I would learn an awful lot about how the Department and the related bits of Washington worked. And that it was also a good place to get yourself known because a lot of senior officers would be consuming your product, would be in and out of the ops center, you would have face to face interaction with a lot of those people. And obviously, there are many advantages to doing that career-wise.

Instead, I chose to go to Kaduna. I got out of that op center assignment and went to Kaduna, which I don't think would be very high on the list of sought after assignments from a vast swath of the Foreign Service. But it was exactly the kind of place that I love to dig into. And, I am not sure this feeling was as strong back then as it came to be, but I came to the conclusion that to the extent possible, I wanted to spend my career overseas. That Washington was not what I enjoyed the most. I recognized that both professionally and for family reasons, it was necessary to spend some time in Washington, but it wasn't, either what made me most enthusiastic about the service or what I was best at.

So anyway, I say that as a preface to my job in AF/S being a place where I think I did some pretty darn good work. But I also think it was probably the place where I made the most serious errors in my career. And I will along the way, as we discuss it, I'll mention a couple of those. One of them was that, while I had fullest confidence in Richard and I gave him full charge of the Angola issue, there were a couple of times along the way when Richard wasn't available for one reason or another, and I had to fill in for him on

something that involved Angola. From time to time, I would get that wrong. When it came time to write my efficiency report---I don't remember if it was the first year or the second year---but you know the way the senior efficiency reports are written. You write it yourself. And then, the rating officer wants to know what is the weak point that I ought to talk about? I said, in my mind, that as much as I had confidence in Richard---and he did a splendid job---I should have been more conversant with that issue and not left it entirely to my deputy. It was a bit of over delegation.

I would say that the third ranking issue on our list was Mozambique, where we had some issues similar to what existed in Angola. Although the United States was not as deeply involved with the Mozambique issue as we were with Angola, nonetheless, it was a difficult one and time consuming. I had a great, great desk officer there in Bill Jackson [Robert P. Jackson].

And then, roughly halfway through my time there, we had to deal with the issue of a horrific drought in southern Africa. Jim Carragher [James Carragher], who was the other deputy in the office was our point man for dealing with that and did so very ably. This first started to come to my attention when I got several late-night phone calls from Gib Lanpher [Edward Gibson Lanpher] who was our ambassador in Zimbabwe, and who, from his vantage point, was recognizing this problem and its criticality well before we were. He pounded on me a little bit and we did what I think we needed to do and that was to gin up the Washington bureaucracy to be as responsive as possible in getting food aid into place. This involved a lot of work with AID obviously.

It was a very positive moment for the de Klerk government in South Africa. There wasn't going to be an effective response to this drought without full cooperation from the South African Government and in many cases, it was proactive. It was not us or anybody else pushing them to be a central part of this relief effort, because they controlled the rail and port access that was critical to getting food into these countries. All of the trucking lines of any significance ran through South Africa. The railroads ran through South Africa, and the ports where all of this food would have to be landed were in South Africa. And the South Africans basically said, "We are going to fully mobilize to make this work".

They recognized the value for their credibility with the rest of the world at the time when some critical negotiations were going on. They came to understand the value of strengthening their credibility and positive relations with their neighbors, which in almost every case had been very, very bad up until this point. So, it was in many ways a win for the apartheid government, as they ceased to become an apartheid government and saved an awful lot of people's lives. It ended up being a very, very effective effort. It wasn't just the United States, but we were really the biggest player outside of the region.

Q: Now, actually, there are quite a few countries in AF/S' portfolio. And shortly after you took over, Mugabe came to Washington.

CHAVEAS: Yes. I do remember that but I must admit, I can't remember any of the substance of it.

Q: But shortly thereafter then, you went on your own orientation trip to the countries of South Africa.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: How did those countries look, and the embassies looked to you?

CHAVEAS: Well, the embassies in general, I was quite impressed. We had an awful lot of good people down there doing their jobs well. In many cases, not under the best of conditions and that was probably most noteworthy in Angola. I will elaborate on that a bit in a moment.

I decided very early on that I wanted to get out to the field and visit most of the countries in Southern Africa. I was not able to do all of them in one fell swoop. Probably not the best choice. Getting out early and getting to at least a few was a good idea, particularly some that I knew would be big issues like Mozambique and Angola. But I ended up being away for a total of six weeks very early in my tenure, and I think I would have done better if I had spent some of that time in Washington, learning the Washington end of my portfolio, learning who the folks elsewhere in the building I was going to need to work with over the course of my time as AF/S director.

Doing it all in one fell swoop was too much. Frankly, by the end of the trip, I was really worn out. I visited Portugal on the way home and I was sick by the time I got there. I kind of dragged myself through a couple of meetings and I don't think that served anybody's interests very well. The visit to Angola though was very illuminating. The elections had not yet taken place. They were coming up. I arrived late at night and flew into Luanda. Got off of the plane and was greeted at the bottom of the stairs by some folks from our liaison office. We didn't have an embassy there, we had a liaison office, and got straight into a car and we just drove away.

They had my luggage. We didn't go through any formalities. That was the way the country was operating at that point. All kinds of people could do that. You could say, "Okay, well, it's the Americans. They manage to get away with those things". All kinds of people were going in and out of the country without any restraints. And that was a contribution to the mess that they were dealing with. We got to the high rise building where our office and our living quarters were. Only three or four people were at the post at that time. Jeff Millington was the senior guy.

I walk in, probably eleven or twelve o'clock at night, and am immediately greeted by Jeff while standing in two or three inches of water. The plumbing had erupted and the whole place was temporarily flooded. We managed to get through that. I was there two or three nights, because of plane schedules and got some sense of the place. Luanda was a wreck. The building that we were in was right across a small city park from the port. During the night, there would be quite a bit of gunfire in the port area and the country was really in difficult straits.

While there was no war per se going on in Luanda, much of the rest of the country was still in a state of war, state of conflict. And meanwhile, efforts were ongoing to try and arrange an electoral process. When that election eventually took place, and Savimbi [Jonas Savimbi] lost the election, he reacted with more violence. He had basically run his campaign depending on his ethnic group for solid support, which he got but that was not a majority of the country. His approach beyond that to others was vote for me or I will kill you. That had some effect but not enough to win him a majority.

As a result, he just chose to continue the war. We, having been his supporters for many, many years, backed away from him. He was getting less and less support. Interestingly enough, the Chinese had been an early supporter of his as and had long since backed away. The Russians were the government's major source of support along with the Cubans. The Soviets and the Cubans, which was a very interesting part of the Angolan calculus all along, and also eventually had a major impact on the negotiations that Chet Crocker was leading in an effort to get a transition of what was then South West Africa, from being a South African controlled area to being an independent state.

Q: At this point, what did you expect the people at the liaison office to be able to do?

CHAVEAS: Well, we needed to maintain contact with the parties as best we could and also, with the United Nations and some of the other actors in the area. Some of the other diplomatic parties. The British were quite involved, and the UN rep Margaret Anstee, was a real, real spark plug. And, boy, she was all over the place, pushing everybody that needed to be pushed. And I remember one of her favorite comments about the Angolan situation was "You know, we are constantly coming up against situations where we are coming to the very precipice, to the very edge of the cliff. And one of my chief responsibilities is to make sure that everyone involved has the proper prescription lenses so that they recognize how close they were coming to that precipice." And she managed that as best as could be done.

Eventually, the elections were held and as I described, they really didn't resolve anything except that they gave the government in Luanda greater credibility. They had won the election. And I always recall, I don't remember the timing exactly here, but we had a meeting in the front office with Hank Cohen, and Jeff was there, I and Richard Roth. I suppose, our desk officer. Anyway, there were six or eight people in the room and one of them was John Byerly, who was the lawyer who covered African Affairs in the Department.

Various folks were speaking up and saying, trying to say that, well, you know, this will work out yet, offering various statements as to why this election had not been in vain. That it was worth continuing to try to push that option. John responded something along the lines of, "No, no, it's time we face up to this. Our policy has not worked. This was a failure. There has to be a different approach." That approach in time would be to pull away from Savimbi very conclusively. But anyway, John didn't get much of an argument when he stated that as bluntly as he did. I should also mention---this was not on that

initial trip---but I made a later trip to several South African destinations with Hank Cohen. Just the two of us.

I probably ought to go through a number of stops on that trip but first the Angola one. We had an Embassy by this time and it had moved to a new location. It was basically a trailer park that we had constructed on the hills just above the city. We had an ambassador by this point, and, as a part of the effort to keep things going, the UN had negotiated an understanding which permitted Savimbi to come and set up headquarters in Luanda. The intent of this effort was to try and get the two major parties in the same place at the same time, and possibly talking to each other.

The government in Luanda, the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola), offered guarantees of Savimbi's safety. The UN endorsed that. Savimbi was permitted to bring a certain bodyguard with him so that he felt that he had some protection. So, he was there in town when we went and we went to meet him. And I could quickly understand this man's hold on people. I mean, this was one of those people where you walk into a room and you've hardly exchanged a word with the individual and you realize the power of his personality. He just had a presence about him that said, "I am in command and you better believe me. And I'm here to tell you how it is".

Anyway, we had what seemed to be a useful meeting. But not too long after we returned to Washington, the Luanda-based government violated their commitment to keep him safe. And they went after him, they attacked his lodgings. I don't recall how he managed to get out of that but what was much more on our mind was that our embassy compound was right in the line of fire, that the shooting was taking place across our trailer park, as I called it.

We were in the ops center. This was at night, our time, and we were on the radio with them constantly. But then we were told, "This is getting too hot, we are going to have to go into the crawl spaces under our trailers to seek safety". And when they did that, we lost all communication with them. I don't recall how long that lasted. It seemed like days, it was only in fact some hours. But nonetheless, there was a period there when we had no clue as to the state of well-being of our personnel. As it ended up, everybody came out of it unwounded, but it was a very, very scary period of time.

Q: Now, your trip with Cohen was in April, mid-April. You hit Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe in it.

CHAVEAS: Yeah.

Q: But you had traveled to some of those same areas just a month before in February.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, a month or so. But Hank was particularly anxious to get directly involved in a couple of these things. One of the reasons was that we knew Savimbi might be available in Angola. But another issue was related to Mozambique. The internal opposition in Mozambique was led by a guy named Dhlakama [Afonso Dhlakama]. One

of the things that complicated our relationship with him was that he had some connections to some Christian missionary groups in the United States, and to some elements of the right in the Republican Party. Those were added reasons why we needed to listen to him.

However, he really operated from way out in the bush and hence, was very hard to communicate with. So, besides going to Maputo on that trip, we went to Malawi. It was not at all to interact with the Malawians but we had been told that if we went to Malawi, Dhlakama would come out across the border. Because his area of operation was just across the border from Malawi, we would come out, he would come out and we could talk with him. And so, we went to Malawi strictly for that purpose and met with him in the ambassador's residence in Lilongwe.

However, before we met with him, we met with a British businessman who was known as Roland "Tiny" Rowland. He was called Tiny because he was anything but---he was a big, big man physically and had been involved in all kinds of business activities, trading, a lot of mining activities and so on, in various parts of South Africa for many, many years. Anybody who was involved in that part of the world certainly knew about Tiny. We got word that Tiny had arrived on his private jet and wanted to talk to us before we spoke to Dhlakama. Which of course we did because we knew that, again, because of business interests, he had good connections to Dhlakama.

Tiny came to see us and basically spent his time telling us how our approach to Mozambique was all wrong. That was his message. I don't remember the specifics but certainly, that was the essential message that he wanted to convey. We listened to him. I don't think we modified anything as a result. We met with Dhlakama. I would say it was a vaguely encouraging discussion, but I don't think we left pointing to anything concrete in terms of progress on that particular issue. It was a very, very difficult situation in Mozambique. There was a government in Maputo which was clearly in control but was also clearly quite corrupt and not terribly competent in delivering any kinds of services beyond the confines of the city. The conflict dragged on for some time.

South Africa was the other stop that we made, actually, it was two stops. In order to travel in those days anywhere in Southern Africa, unless you had your own aircraft which we didn't, you ended up going through Joburg on your way to anywhere. And so, on one of our stops, we stopped in Jo'burg and we met with Nelson Mandela. He was, of course, out at this point---I have previously described the ceremony that I had attended while I was CG [consul general] for his return to Soweto. Well, this time we met in his office. I don't remember exactly who was there other than our ambassador and Hank and I. Undoubtedly, there was a political officer taking notes, and then there were a handful on Mandela's side.

What really struck me about that meeting was its contrast with a meeting that we had had the night before. We had been back and forth through Joburg several times on this trip because of the airline connections. And Hank, very, very much wanted to meet with Pik Botha, who was the foreign minister and had long been known as an advocate for change

there, although not an advocate for enough change, and now found himself in the position of being a senior negotiator with the ANC over the eventual transition. He had been hard to pin down for a meeting as we passed through these repeated times. The excuse usually being that he was tied up with the negotiations.

Anyway, finally, this one time we got agreement that we would meet him at the airport, because the venue where they were holding the negotiations was not far from the airport. We arrived in the evening, fairly late, and waited for him in the VIP lounge. He finally came in with one or two aides, and he looked completely disheveled and was pretty obviously under the influence. Anyway, we sat down for the meeting, and he laid out a notebook in front of him. And it was obvious that he had done precious little preparation for this meeting because he had a notebook. I mean, I was sitting right there, I could read it myself, and he proceeded to just read his talking points to us. And while he was doing this, he had his head down almost with his nose in the notebook, which was on a table, kind of at knee level.

In the midst of reading his talking points, he had finished off the drink that had been handed to him when he first came in, and he held it up behind his head so that one of his aides could immediately refill it. I don't know exactly what he was drinking but I think it had something to do with whiskey. And that was kind of how the meeting proceeded until the very end of the discussion and Pik turned to Hank Cohen, and almost got nose to nose with him. He said, "Hank, you have to help us. You have to help us. We are at a critical state in these negotiations. Mandela is not a well man. He is under enormous pressure from his own people." This was during all of the Winnie Mandela scandals coming to light, and Pik said, "you know, he is trying to deal with this situation with his wife." "Please, please help us". And Hank said, "Well, I will be meeting with Mandela tomorrow morning, and I will see what we can do".

Well, end of that meeting. The next morning, early, we went to see Mandela. There was a small group of us. Mandela was impeccably dressed. Absolutely on top of the issues of the day, gave absolutely no sense that he was in any way unnerved by the current circumstances. No indication that he was in any way wavering in his pursuit of the objectives that he sought. He was in total command during that meeting and the contrast was just extraordinary.

Q: And when Cohen returned to Washington, what did he take from all this?

CHAVEAS: Well, I think, in recounting those things and my own impressions, I think we shared those opinions. And I think, particularly, we shared the sense of desperation about what was happening in Angola and how that could ever turn out in any particularly positive way. As you may know, eventually, it was resolved when Savimbi was killed. This was after my time in the office. His armed movement quickly collapsed. That ended that conflict, but it led to an Angola that has never ever come close to realizing its potential, that wallowed in graft. I mean, really wallowed in graft from the very top down, and this was a country of tremendous potential, and it has never been realized. I

have followed it less closely of late but I know of no indication that things have gotten a whole lot better.

Q: Now, you accompanied Assistant Secretary Cohen on this trip and I noticed that Richard Roth accompanied him to Angola later in September. So, Cohen was making himself a part of all these meetings and discussions?

CHAVEAS: Well, these were some of the highest profile issues that the Bureau was dealing with. And so, the personal attention of officials from the most senior level possible was very critical. But I have to relate one incident, again related to Angola. I don't remember the exact timing but it would have been shortly after the change of administration when Warren Christopher became Secretary of State, and he made a point of touring the building and sitting in on weekly staff meetings in various bureaus. And early on, he came to our weekly staff meeting. George Moose was now the assistant secretary. And it was made known in advance that he wanted to hear about Angola and because I was the one who sat in on those meetings, with a lot of support from Richard Roth, I went well primed to brief him on the situation in Angola.

Christopher was there with one aide, and as I began to speak about Angola, the aide was furiously taking notes. I mean, he must have been recording me verbatim. I looked down at my notes at one point and then looked back up, and Christopher had fallen asleep. He was actually renowned for this but I was initially quite taken aback but the aide just signaled, keep going, keep going. So, I completed what I had to say. The Secretary woke up again and thanked me for the briefing. The aide quite clearly had taken very thorough notes and I'm sure told Christopher what he had missed.

Q: Let's talk for a minute about management style. How big was AF/S at this time? How many officers?

CHAVEAS: Oh, dear. I can't off the top of my head tell you all. We had two officers for South Africa, as I recall. We had individual officers each for Angola and Mozambique and then several of the other officers covered two, and in one case, three countries. The case of three countries was Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. I remember it as a group of very good people, really engaged with their subjects. Lois Cecsarini was the Angola officer. She was a quiet, reserved individual but boy was she on top of her subject. And if you said something stupid, she was quite diplomatic about it but you knew you had said something stupid.

Q: Actually, I think she went to Angola at the time of the elections.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, she was very busy out there. Another one who was a standout was Bill Jackson who handled Mozambique. Eventually, when I was asked to go over to AF/W [Office of West African Affairs], part of my bargain was to get Bill Jackson to come over to handle one of our most difficult accounts over there, Liberia.

Q: Now, would you say everybody on AF/S at this time were from South Africa hence? Experts? I asked that because I see that you made sure everybody had an orientation trip to the country they covered.

CHAVEAS: You know, I can't answer your question about the extent to which people had previous experience. Certainly, most of them did. There were some whom I believe didn't. But as I have said before, throughout my career and particularly when I had supervisory responsibilities, I just always emphasized, travel, travel, travel. Get out and see firsthand what it is you are dealing with because sitting in your office, reading the reports, talking to people in capitals, just wasn't going to get you the full picture. So, I always pushed that approach.

Q: Did you get much support from the admin people or the front office? Orientation travels are expensive.

CHAVEAS: I don't think I can remember a single time when I got pushed back on that, not once.

Q: The U.S. had an election in November '92 and a new administration started in '93. Did that set a different atmosphere for your office?

CHAVEAS: It did. It set a different atmosphere for the entire bureau and it was not a positive one. And I don't mean that it brought in policies that we found difficult. If anything, with a couple of exceptions, they were consistent with what we had been doing. Perhaps even a little more push in areas where we thought a little more push was relevant. But I hate to badmouth a colleague, but George Moose did a very, very poor job as assistant secretary, in his internal management of the office, of the entire bureau.

Very early on in his tenure, he announced a virtual clean sweep of office directors. Almost everybody was either moved out of the Bureau completely or moved to a different position.. Initially, I was the only exception. George told me that he wanted me to stay on in AF/S. I had asked to stay on for a third year, even before he arrived in AF, and he confirmed that he was quite happy to have me do that. I might add that he never told me any of that personally. He always conveyed those things through a deputy which was, I think, an unfortunate part of his style.

Also, early on, he encouraged us all to be traveling because he said, "I don't want to travel. I want to be here and mind this shop in Washington, tend to interests beyond the bureau, and that he expected his deputies and his office directors and others to do the traveling. He, over time, I think, learned that that didn't work but that certainly was the early direction that we got. I know that under that administration, George received an awful lot of micromanaging from the White House, much of which was not transparent to us. We knew it was happening but beyond that, we were often kept in the dark.

All of this created a situation in the bureau where there was a lot of unhappiness. The chatter in the hallways during this time was often to the effect of "What does George

want? What is his mission for this bureau? What is his direction?”. We just didn't have a sense of where he was taking us. And this sentiment made its way up the line and came to George's attention. And so, he declared one day that we were going to have a half day off-site. We went to a restaurant outside of D.C. [District of Columbia]. We were all in there for half a day. We had lunch together. We talked a lot. George talked a lot but also seemed to be listening. And we all came out of the meeting, and I thought to a man or a woman, we also all came out with the exact same question, “What does George want?”.

It clarified nothing in my mind nor did I have the sense that it cleared the minds of any, or at least most of my colleagues. It was very difficult. And then, having told me that he wanted me to stay in AF/S, he sometime later reversed himself and said, “I've got a real problem down in AF/W. You have a very good reputation for your management style and a lot of experience in West Africa. I would like you to go down there and work this out”. I never really thought I was being given a choice but I did manage to leverage my agreement to get his support for moving four people out of AF/S and into AF/W. Two of them were office managers, and two of them were desk officers. And that both helped and hindered the situation that I found in AF/W.

Q: Early in the new administration, you accompanied Assistant Secretary Moose to Cape Town, to a conference and whatnot. So, that would have given you an opportunity to chat, share drinks, see what he was about? Did that help?

CHAVEAS: Well, again, this is an indication. The specific event that we were going out for was one of a series of conferences of a very small circle of people from both the States and South Africa, sponsored by the Aspen Institute. I had been to at least one, perhaps two of them before. This was the first one that took place in South Africa that I went to. And I suppose that was, again, indicative of the problem that George posed was that I do remember that he was there. I remember nothing else about that trip that relates to George Moose. I remember the conference, aspects of the conference very well, and I remember my subsequent travels or at least parts of my subsequent travels very well. If I remember correctly, George and I were not together on those later parts of the trip.

But I came away with no impression of George whatsoever. What I do remember of that trip was during the conference, two of our speakers---and again, I emphasize, this is a very small group---if there were twenty of us involved, I would be surprised. And two of the speakers were Cyril Ramaphosa, who is now the president of South Africa but who at that time was the chief negotiator for the ANC, and his Afrikaner counterpart Roelf Meyer. They spoke to us and the impression that I came away with, and I know some of the others did, was that if we could lock those two guys in a room for a week, we would have a final agreement for a transition to a post-apartheid government in short order. These two guys, they understood each other. They understood the restraints that each other was working under. I mean, it was a wonderful experience. But of course, they were operating in a wider world and that is not the way things went. But that was quite an impression.

Then, that conference was over and we were going into the four-day Easter weekend in South Africa. The South Africans very much observe that four-day weekend. Nothing goes on. So, I took the opportunity to drive up to Lesotho in a rented car, through the really, really beautiful, austere terrain between Cape Town and Lesotho. It is really spectacular, particularly at that time of year. If you want something to bring to your mind the idea of what that terrain is like, think of Monument Valley in the southwest U.S. which appeared in so many Western movies of our youth. That's the terrain, and then add in the spectacular lightning storms and rainstorms that that area frequently experienced. And I experienced all of that, it was terrific just to see that countryside.

Then I got up in Lesotho just in time to do some business. There had been a change of government in Lesotho, I believe as the product of a military coup. I was the first U.S. government official outside of the embassy to interact with the new government and had an opportunity to get a sense of its leadership, and also to convey to them our concerns about their particular situation. I then drove on to Jo'burg and it was an extraordinarily interesting and tense time to be there because over the Easter weekend, an anti-apartheid leader, Chris Hani, a particularly prominent player in the opposition to apartheid, had been murdered in his own driveway by a right-wing politician and some collaborators.

I attended a memorial service for him in the Central Methodist Church in downtown Johannesburg, along with our consul general John Hirsch and some other people that I had known, other South Africans that I have known well. And it was quite remarkable that all the parties involved managed that situation, which was very, very volatile, without an explosion that would have just destroyed the negotiating process. And with that, I think that may have to be our breaking point for today. I've got something I need to go on to.

Q: Do you have ten minutes?

CHAVEAS: Max, yeah.

Q: Okay. I wanted to back up a little bit. You were sitting on a Washington desk during the transition between administrations. That was a lot of paperwork either requested or desired. How did your desk handle the transition paperwork?

CHAVEAS: I remember that we had to produce an awful lot of it. It was a challenge but nothing that we were not up to. It was not the first time I had been in a situation where we had to produce an awful lot of paperwork on some short, short timelines. That was a certain part of the routine of living in the Department for any period of time.

Q: Okay, well with that, as you say, why don't we break it off today.

Q: It is the 18th of August, we are returning to our conversation with Ambassador Chaveas

Q: You had a couple of more comments.

CHAVEAS: Well, a couple of things that I wanted to finish up with on AF/S. Early on, in our discussion of this, I talked about my approach to my career in that I sought to maximize my time overseas and minimize my time in Washington. In part because I never felt that the Washington environment was where I was most effective. And secondly, I joined the Foreign Service in no small part because I wanted to be foreign. And I said that it was during my time in AF/S that I thought I had made some of my biggest errors as a Foreign Service officer, and I wanted to talk about one in particular.

As the second year of my tenure there moved along and we were watching developments in South Africa, the negotiating process was moving. Although, there were an awful lot of potholes along the way, most particularly, a growing problem with internal violence in the country. But I wasn't pollyannaish about the negotiating process, but I was optimistic that it was going to produce the desired result and bring about a transition to democratic government. And it occurred to me that we really needed to start thinking now about how we would transition our policy towards South Africa, and particularly, how we would transition our economic policy. We, of course, had sanctions on South Africa for several years at this point. The economy was not in good shape. And yet, if a new government came to power, it was going to have to face enormous, almost unresolvable expectations from its population.

I felt quite strongly that we needed to be thinking about how we could, at least to some extent, alleviate those pressures. And that would mean things like adjusting our sanctions, starting to think about how we might encourage American investment, both to return and also new investment to come in. How we might have to adjust our aid programs and perhaps ramp them up in magnitude. So, all of that was turning around in my mind and I started to draft a think piece related to that. My big error in all of this is that I did not talk to other people who had to be involved widely enough. I don't really remember who I did or didn't talk to, but I realized over time that I really didn't do enough. We were talking about a pretty significant shift in U.S. focus here, and it needed to be talked about around the building and in other related bureaucracies before we could move on it in any significant way.

A particularly big mistake that I made was that I chose to do the first draft of this paper, rather than have our desk officer do it. We had a very, very capable guy on the desk, Dan Mozena. For obvious reasons, he focused all of his time on South Africa while I was doing it part time as office director. I think the whole process would have benefited greatly from his insights from the start. Anyway, when we finally presented, more correctly, I presented the paper to a gathering of the wider community that had to address this, it got a pretty negative reaction. This happened just about when I was going out the door and moving down the hall to AF/W so I had precious little opportunity to follow up and perhaps fix some of the damage I had done.

And then, after I had left, it really became kind of irrelevant because the negotiating process in South Africa took several steps backwards. Principally, because it became clear that elements within the Afrikaner government were instigating much of the violence that was going on. And that greatly undermined the position and credibility of President de Klerk as he worked through the process. Anyway, I frankly don't know how many of the ideas that I included in that paper ever really saw the light of day. Anyway, bad decision on my part. I should have consulted much more widely, and most critically, in my mind, I should have included the desk officer in that more fully. He wasn't totally unaware of what I was doing, but I really didn't engage him on it and I regret that.

The other thing is, we didn't talk at all about Malawi. And of course, at this point in time, I didn't know I was going there as ambassador a little bit further down the line. But along with the bigger issues that AF/S was engaged with---meaning South Africa, Angola, Mozambique---there was the issue of Malawi, where there had been a deteriorating political situation for quite some time in what was one of the poorest countries in the world, which had been under authoritarian one-man rule almost from its inception. But because it was such an impoverished country, it had also been able to take advantage of an awful lot of activities from various countries, aid programs, to include ourselves. We had a very substantial program going on there.

Over time, because the authoritarian leadership was becoming ever more so, some of the smaller donors, many NGOs [non-government organizations], the Scandinavians, various others, just dropped off. They removed their programs all together and the list of donors was whittled down to a very small group. It really came down to us, the UK [United Kingdom], the European Union and the United Nations. Those folks started talking to each other and I was quite involved with this, and we started talking with our counterparts in AID [United States Agency for International Development] about whether we did need to exercise the leverage that we had, because this was such an aid dependent country to try and bring about some significant change in the country. And ultimately, we did decide collectively that we would make it clear to the Malawians that if there was not some opening of their political system, we would not be able to continue our programs.

And lo and behold, the President Banda [Hastings Banda], agreed in the first place to conduct a referendum on one party rule. We strongly believed that he did so because he was totally confident that he would win that referendum. Well, he did not. The people voted for multiparty elections. And those went forward under still more pressure from us, and the example of what was transpiring in South Africa. Those elections were held, they were reasonably free and fair. And lo and behold, the lifelong President Banda was voted out of office. And all of this would come to transpire while I was down in AF/W and the new government would be installed very shortly before I went out there as Ambassador, but that part of it is down the road a bit. That was an example, you know, unlike the one about South Africa that I just referenced, that was one where there was very smooth, collective collaboration on all of this.

Q: Now, you were saying earlier that George Moose sort of moved people around and you were asked to take over AF/W. What stimulated that shift for you?

CHAVEAS: Well, and I feel a little like I am piling on George Moose but I think this is another horrible example. Early on in his tenure, as I had said before, he confirmed to me that I was to stay on in AF/S for another year, which was my desire. But he also, very early on, had an all hands meeting with the bureau staff. This included the two directors of AF/W---AF/W had been separated into two pieces some years before, basically, because people in the office could not get along with each other. And it was, I guess, the path of least resistance at that time. They stayed in the same office complex, they were all sitting together on a daily basis, but it was not a friendly environment.

Anyway, George during the course of this all hands meeting with those two directors of the subdivisions sitting right there in front of him, said words to the effect that he had decided this division within AF/W had to end and said right to the two directors, "It has been a failure, hasn't it?". And these guys were just stunned because he had not discussed one iota of this with them in any way, shape, or form. They had no idea this was coming. So obviously, they had got their backs up. They were embarrassed and then, subsequently, I was asked to move and become director of the combined office. George presented it to me as flattering to me, telling me that I had an excellent reputation as a manager, and this was a situation that required that kind of attention. And of course, I had significant experience in AF/W and in West Africa to take it along.

So, once that decision was made, I was still very engaged with the job in AF/S but I would periodically take the opportunity to walk down the hall to AF/W and talk to people down there, and try and get the lay of the land. One of the directors that I would be replacing was pretty cooperative on the whole, the other one was very uncooperative. Anyway, I ultimately made that move and it was not until I was down there full time that I came to realize the extent to which George had handed me a poison pill. The office was, as you can imagine, had daggers drawn against each other by this point. And I also, when I was sitting in AF/W full time, came to recognize that one of the issues was that every single one of the officers in what had been the Anglophone side of the office---Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia--- was a white male. And everyone on the Francophone, Lusophone side of the shop was female, minority or both. And that was clearly just another element of the division that existed in that office.

With this change, the two director positions disappeared. It was just one. And now, there were two deputy director positions, Jeff Millington had been the liaison officer in Angola when I first was involved there. And on the other side was Jackie Briggs [Jacquelyn Briggs]. Jackie took on the Lusophone, Francophone side of things and Jeff took on the Anglophone package. One of the things that I wanted to do, just in terms of rearranging the geography a little bit, was that I wanted to establish a small conference room within our office space so that we could hold joint meetings as necessary. Certainly, on a weekly basis but there would be other occasions, so that people would get used to the idea of sitting down together as one unit and talking through what we were doing and what the issues were.

Well, the office space for AF/W made it a bit complicated to achieve this. There were two large offices which at one time had accommodated one director and one deputy director. I asked the deputy director on the Anglophone side to go down and take a smaller office so we could convert one of the larger offices into a conference space. I asked Jackie Briggs if she had any objection to going into an office the same size as any desk officer because that was what was available, and she had no objection. Well, again, to poison the atmosphere a little more, one day, probably about six weeks after this change, I get a call from the front office. George Moose wants to see me right away. "What is the subject?". "I don't know, just please get up here as soon as you can". So, I went up to George's office and walked in and there was George and Pru Bushnell [Prudence Bushnell] who was one of the DASes, Jackie Briggs, and there may have been a couple of other people, but I don't recall.

And basically, George wanted to know why I was discriminating against Jackie in my distribution of office space. I was utterly stunned. Jackie had never suggested to me that she had any issue with her office space. She later apologized to me for going all the way up to George without ever discussing her concerns with me, but the damage was done. I eventually resolved this by giving the two deputies the two biggest offices in the complex. I went down to a smaller office, which actually had been the one that I had occupied when I was officer in charge of Nigeria some years before. We struggled on from there. That was the kind of atmosphere that prevailed. One of the things that I did, I had done this in AF/S earlier and I would do it both of the times that I was chief of mission, in the first couple of weeks that I was in the office, I would make time to sit down with each individual officer and listen to them about their concerns. I think that was helpful. That did take some of the edge off of things. But in the year that I was there, I can't say that we fully overcame the personal animosities that existed. It was not a year that I enjoyed, indeed one of the low points of my career.

Q: You had mentioned at one point that you brought some people with you from AF/S.

CHAVEAS: I did. I brought down two desk officers. Bill Jackson, who had been the Mozambique office desk officer in AF/S, handled the Liberia account, which was one of the hottest ones we were dealing with. And I am trying to remember the other one. I can't, I can't---

Q: Secretarial?

CHAVEAS: What's that?

Q: Secretarial?

CHAVEAS: Well, I brought---two secretaries came down. We did still call them secretaries then. But there was also a desk officer and I'm afraid memory is failing me there.

Q: In addition to this introduction to foreign service personnel issues, what were some of the major issues that AF/W handled?

CHAVEAS: Well, one was the death of Houphouet-Boigny [Felix Houphouet-Boigny], the long-serving life president of the Ivory Coast. One of the most respected African leaders, and unlike some other life presidents, somebody who had done some significant positive things for his country. The death was not entirely unanticipated---he was getting on in years. The issue was trying to get the appropriate level of U.S. representation to go to the funeral. And, of course, that becomes a White House issue. We were trying to get the Secretary of State or even the deputy would have been a very good gesture; national security adviser, you know, AID administrator. Anyway, this dragged on and on and on and on, and it wasn't until a few days before the actual event that we were able to announce a member of the cabinet would be going. I frankly don't remember which member it was. Not one who was particularly relevant to our engagement with Cote d'Ivoire but nonetheless, it was somebody of cabinet rank who went out and represented us.

Going down the list, Liberia was a horrific situation, along with Sierra Leone. They were kind of a package. And to a lesser extent, Guinea. Internal violence in all three had been a serious issue and intervention by one into the other's issues had been a real problem. Charles Taylor had been the head of Liberia and then was overthrown and taken to the bush to try and unsettle things. Along the way, he sought control of the diamond fields in Sierra Leone, contributing greatly to the violence there.

Taylor, who was an acolyte of Muammar Gaddafi, had trained in Libya and was receiving military equipment from him. We within AF/W and particularly Bill Jackson, did some yeoman work on this. We were trying to get some more resources to try and be of assistance in this country where we had traditional interests. The amount that we were putting into it, the amount of focus that it was getting, was trivial given the nature of the problem. And this again was a point at which I came into conflict with George Moose. I was finding his lack of focus on this problem really quite galling, and it was something that he would never, never really explain. I do believe that some of the resistance that he had to deal with came from the National Security Council staff, but he was never transparent about that so, I am not very knowledgeable.

But anyway, at one point, things were particularly ugly and I enlisted Pru Bushnell, one of the DASes, the one who was responsible for oversight of AF/W to go out for a visit to Liberia with me. One of the things that we did during that visit was, with the assistance of the UN [United Nations] military observer mission, we were flown by helicopter up to the headquarters in the bush where Charles Taylor was operating. It was kind of a hairy adventure, we landed---the landing zone for the helicopter was on one side of town and we were driven across town with teenagers all over the place with automatic weapons, on the streets. We got over to Charles Taylor's office and met with him, along with our ambassador Bill Twaddell. Pru Bushnell was sitting closest to Taylor and he could not have been more condescending to a woman than he was. Pru took that for a while, but

then made it clear that his attitude was totally unacceptable and that was the point at which he threw us out of his office.

That made us even more nervous about the return drive across town to get on the helicopter, but there were no negative repercussions immediately. One of the best things that I got out of that and a few other visits to Liberia that I made during that year---was that I got to know the head of the UN military observer mission there quite well. Daniel Opande was a Kenyan three star, and by the time I got to Sierra Leone many years later as ambassador, he was the head of the UN military presence that was the largest in the world at the time. Having that relationship was invaluable.

The other account that took up most of our time besides all of the management issues, was Nigeria and our ambassador to Nigeria. The situation was that Babangida, the general who had been running the country for some time, had committed to returning the country to civilian rule and elections were conducted, but the results were highly disputed. Most observers believed that a businessman by the name of Abiola [Moshood Abiola] was the winner, but not decisively so. There were doubts about that. But anyway, Babangida took it as an opportunity to just terminate the whole process. He did leave office but he put in power a handpicked civilian interim government. But the issue that really cropped up immediately after the elections was our ambassador in Lagos, Walter Carrington. I had known going back many years. He was the head of Peace Corps Africa at the time that I became a volunteer. Somebody that I had a very high regard for.

Well, when we got to this point in the elections where there was great dispute over who had won, he failed to see, in my view, his responsibility to separate his conviction that Abiola had won from his responsibility as a U.S. government official to emphasize adherence to the process. He did some things that very much identified him with Abiola, and which proved rather counterproductive. Another issue at the same time was that we had a consul general up in Kaduna, Helen Weinland, whom I had worked with years before when she was one of the officers on the Nigeria desk, when I was the officer in charge on Nigeria. She was very, very unhappy up there, with some justification I thought, although I wasn't entirely convinced. Anyway, I went up and spent some time in Kaduna with Helen and listened to her complaints and tried to smooth that particular point of conflict over.

Q: Was that admin or was it a personnel issue or just embassy guidance?

CHAVEAS: I think both. Helen, with some real justification, felt that over the course of her career, she had been discriminated against as a woman. And then, some other issues specific to her relationships with the ambassador and the DCM [deputy chief of mission] and so on, aggravated the problem.

Q: Now, as this was unfolding in 1994, you were picked to be ambassador to Malawi?

CHAVEAS: Right.

Q: Was that, given the personnel situation in the Bureau, how did that come about?

CHAVEAS: Well, I think in part, it was just my time. I had put in my many years in the AF [African Affairs] Bureau. I was highly experienced, both in the field and now in Washington with relations with African Affairs, and I think it was generally felt that I had reached the point in my career where I was qualified for this. I had some hopes of going to some other locations, but George in his review statement of my performance as I left, told me how he was forever indebted to me for undertaking an assignment under very difficult circumstances. That view didn't necessarily show up when the nominating time came along. But anyway, as I told one of the DASes upstairs, by the time that I was nominated to Malawi, I was elated to be getting out of Washington and out of the Bureau and most destinations would have been satisfactory. That said, having been involved in AF/S with respect to Malawi, I really did look forward to the prospect. It was a very interesting period of transition going on.

Q: Well, part of that transition is that Banda lost the presidential election that would follow on to the referendum.

CHAVEAS: Right.

Q: And Malawi has a new president. When you had your hearings, who was the senator that introduced you, and was it much of detailed discussion?

CHAVEAS: There were, I believe, three ambassadors in the hearings that day. There was our ambassador going to Angola, our ambassador to one other African destination, I'm afraid I don't recall that, and I. None of us was introduced by a senator and the focus of the hearings was very much on the ambassador going to Angola. I got a few perfunctory questions, all of which I had anticipated. It was not much of an event from my perspective.

Q: I was noticing in my notes that in preparation for going to post, you were briefed on the renovations, I guess, in progress at the chancellery?

CHAVEAS: I was. I can't say that I remember very much about them. They were security upgrades and they were completed by the time I got to post. So, I wasn't there while people were going through the displacements that were involved. I should backtrack a little and mention one event that occurred before I got there which was certainly relevant to the security upgrades. During the electoral process in Malawi, one of the negotiated agreements was that prior to the elections, an organization known as the Young Pioneers would be disbanded. This was an element of the ruling party, and what it really was a very extensive organization of young thugs at every level of society in the country. There were Young Pioneers in virtually every village, and they were the party's enforcers.

And of course, people running against Banda had good reason to believe that they would be used against them during any electoral process. So, it was agreed that they would be disbanded. But the disbanding didn't take place. It kept getting postponed and postponed.

Finally, what happened was that the Malawi Army, which had an excellent reputation for keeping its distance from anything political, was really quite a professional little organization. Well, one day, the senior leadership of that military lost control of its force. There was a bar fight in one of the northern towns, between a couple of soldiers and some Young Pioneers, and both of the soldiers were shot. And the rank and file of the Army went after the Young Pioneers and basically destroyed the Young Pioneers. They ceased to exist as a coherent organization as a result.

The military invaded the central office of the ruling party, ransacked the building, and the immediate security problem for us was that the embassy was right across the street from this building. There was a lot of indiscriminate firing emanating from the building, including some that was coming in our direction. We were not anybody's target but we were just in the wrong neighborhood at that time. This was before I got there but the story that was told to me, not by the individual but by his colleagues, was that our defense attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Blue Keller, put on his dress uniform, marched across the street and into the building and ordered all of them to cut it out and they obeyed, which really said something about the credibility of Blue Keller. He was an extraordinary defense attaché, and that particular problem was solved right then and there by one U.S. Army officer. Kudos to him. But anyway, I don't think that's what prompted the security upgrades, but it certainly made them more relevant.

Q: Well, I think we've got a natural break right at the moment because otherwise, we go into your ambassadorship. So why don't we break off here?

CHAVEAS: Okay.

Q: So, it is the 1st of September. New month, new interview. Peter, you have now been assigned to Malawi and Malawi was one of your AF/S [Southern African Affairs Bureau] countries. So, you are very familiar with the circumstances there. How does one get to Malawi those days?

CHAVEAS: Well, back in those days you could go via London. We did go to London, I had consultations, and I also went on to Paris for consultations. And we flew down from Paris on Air France on what I described at that time as the flight to "L". Not hell but "L", because we went down via Libreville, Lusaka and then Lilongwe. It was a pleasant trip, if long, and we were greeted at the airport, despite the fact that it was Labor Day, by almost the entire staff including the AID [United States Agency for International Development] mission choir, which had composed a special song to greet Ambassador and Mrs. Chaveas. So, we were well received. We then proceeded to the residence, which I already knew, because I had visited there as AF/S director.

I recall that when my assignment to Malawi became public, but I was still in Washington, quite a few times somebody would stop me in the hall, somebody who was familiar with the physical setup in Malawi and would say something like, "Wow, nice residence". The

residence in Malawi at that time was regarded as one of the nicest in Africa. The other one was in Gabon and I eventually got to that one as well. It was a very nice place but rather more palatial than the California style house that we had in Lilongwe. The climate in Lilongwe was nice most of the year, permitting us to just have the house open all the time. The house and gardens were very comfortable.

Q: Now, what did the embassy look like as a work office?

CHAVEAS: Well, nothing about the embassy building greatly distinguished it. It was kind of a pillbox shaped building. It was on a nice piece of land, but it was also, as I described in our last session, right across the street from the headquarters of the old ruling party. It was in a section of Lilongwe which was largely reserved for diplomatic missions and so, the British and the UN were down the street from us. The French were on the street behind us. Lilongwe was a rather unique place. Since independence and for a long time after that the capital of Malawi was in Blantyre. Blantyre remained the commercial capital of the country. But because under Banda Malawi maintained diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa, unlike any other country in black Africa, as a reward, the South Africans supported the construction of this new capital which Banda very much wanted because it was in much closer proximity to his birthplace, and also much more in the center of his political support. It made for a rather sterile city. There were a lot of nice government buildings, some nice business and commercial districts, and of course, diplomatic missions. But the rest of the city didn't feel like a city. I used to say that, as much as we liked Malawi and living and working in Lilongwe could be very pleasant, on a weekend, it was one of the duller places you could ever want to be. Which is one of the reasons why I picked up golf during my time in Malawi.

Q: Now, how about the staffing? Is this a large embassy or a modest size?

CHAVEAS: No, it was a modest sized establishment. Although we had a very substantial AID mission and they were in their own building, which was a couple of blocks removed from the embassy itself. A bit later on, we can go into the AID program which was very important. We also had a USIS [United States Information Service] office, which was located in a nearby shopping center, and which was a valuable part of our mission as well. And then, on top of that, we had a very large and long-standing Peace Corps presence. A hundred and some volunteers.

Q: When I was on a promotion panel one time, it was obvious that a lot of the positions in African embassies were very junior officers.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: Is that the case for you?

CHAVEAS: Yes, we had a number of first and second tour officers. You know, the consular position. Consular-political position was filled by a young man who I believe was on his first tour. Our econ commercial officer, Karen Levine, might have been as

much as on her third tour. Her husband was a program officer in the AID mission. So yeah, it was a fairly young group of folks.

Q: Now, you noticed that you were the first ambassador to present your credentials to the new democratically elected head of state. Malawi had just gone through this transition.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: How was it that you were the first to present your credentials?

CHAVEAS: Well, the new government had taken over in May or June of that year. I arrived in September and the presentation of my credentials was at most a week after I arrived. The new government was, I think, very anxious to have the kind of endorsement involved in having an American ambassador because there was a ceremony attached to presenting credentials that was something that could be publicized.

The new president, Bakili Muluzi, even though the official capital was Lilongwe, liked the surroundings of the presidential palace that Banda had constructed in Blantyre. So, he continued to have many functions in that palace, to include the presentation of credentials by ambassadors. Strictly speaking, the new ambassador from South Korea should have been the next ambassador to present his credentials. However, both events were scheduled for the same day. The ambassador from South Korea was not resident, he came over from I believe, Zimbabwe.

The United States, of course, was a big donor that the Malawians were anxious to please. They really wanted me to be first and the South Korean was very gracious about that, he never objected in any way. So, I presented mine and an hour later, the South Korean presented his. That whole event was a great reminder of the fact that Hastings Banda was not long gone. Banda was a great admirer of British ceremony and so, ambassadors presenting their credentials to Banda did so in morning dress. The new government in time decided that that was a leftover that they didn't want to continue, but they had not been convinced on that point as yet.

Our chargé, Greg Engle [Gregory W. Engle], before I got out there, tried to impress upon the chief of protocol that it would be a good sign that they had made this transition if they went to a somewhat less formal way of presenting the new ambassadors. As we subsequently learned, Muluzi himself was quite open to the change but the chief of protocol was very attached to the old ways. He didn't bother to have much of a conversation, if any, with Muluzi about how things should be done other than to say, "Well, this is the way we have always done it". So, before I left Washington, I had to go out and buy a morning suit. I have only ever worn it twice. Once was for that event and then, not too long after we retired here to North Carolina, we were invited to a Halloween party. I went dressed as a diplomat and wore the suit for the occasion. It has never been worn otherwise. Nonetheless, we went through the ceremony, it was quite formal. I had the DCM [deputy chief of mission], the AID mission director and our defense attaché along with me for that ceremony.

The ceremony itself was rather stiff but afterwards, Muluzi and I had a one-on-one session which was very friendly, in which he expressed copious gratitude for the support the United States have given to the effort to transition to democracy. He welcomed me warmly, personally and it was a very good experience. I might add that I was driven to the ceremony in a vintage Rolls-Royce. My wife was also taken to have tea with Mrs. Muluzi. Mrs. Muluzi was quite open with Lucille, including telling her that her husband was not actually quite as old as he claimed to be. He had fudged his birth records by a couple of years because he was concerned that in a society where age was revered, to be as young as he was, which was not all that young, would be a handicap in politics. So, he fudged the records a bit but only by a couple of years.

Q: Now, what are America's interests in Malawi? What were you focused on?

CHAVEAS: Well, first and foremost, we were helping to build this nascent democracy that we had played some role in bringing about. I described a major part of my role, as well as the role of some other people in our mission particularly our AID director, as being democracy coaches. We had some quite structured programs to help the Malawians deal with the issues of developing a new democracy. The National Democratic Institute had a presence there and they ran any number of training programs for Malawians in government, particularly in the legislature. We took some opportunities to send some Malawians to the United States for chances to observe our institutions and how they function. But there were times when it came down to talking to some official in the government to try and steer them in a slightly different direction.

One of the problems with Muluzi was that number one, he had never had any experience of being a democratically elected official at any level. He had grown up in the one-party structure that Banda had created. In fact, he had been a prominent player in that structure. That's what he knew about governance and that didn't provide him with some of the best lessons on how to govern in a democratic fashion. A particular sore point was freedom of the press. In the wake of the changes, several fairly good newspapers had cropped up. We worked with some of those newspapers, to help them develop their capabilities particularly through our USIS programs. Well, along the way, they of course said some things that Muluzi did not find particularly attractive. I had a number of conversations with him about how in the United States, political leadership, including the president, gets abused pretty regularly. And that we considered it fundamental to the operation of our democracy that those things be permitted to happen.

In the legislature, the speaker of the House, who was a very impressive fellow, was very steeped in British parliamentary tradition and procedure. He, I think, in the circumstances did a very, very effective job as speaker. However, he was dealing with all these newly elected parliamentarians who had no sense whatsoever of the procedures of a parliament, of the limitations on their authority, of the significance or lack thereof of loyalty to the party whose ticket you had been elected on. There was just all this lack of experience with things that we would think of as so very basic to the functioning of a democratic government. And so, we tried to do some of that through established programs but also

there were frequent occasions when we had to have some frank conversations with individuals.

The vice president of Malawi was a gentleman by the name of Justin Malewezi. Justin was a graduate of Columbia University so he understood Americans. And he had also been a very prominent civil servant through much of the Banda years so he knew what that was all about. I found that he was somebody that I could speak extremely frankly with. And sometimes, I would go to him with concerns, particularly a couple of times on human rights issues, where I could be extremely frank, where I knew similar frankness speaking to the president would not have been particularly effective.

An issue that began to crop up and one on which I became both quite publicly vocal but also had a lot of one-on-one conversations with various folks about, was corruption and mismanagement of government resources. Corruption was not new to Malawi but prior to the change in government, it had been confined to a small circle of people, basically those who were closest to power, to Banda himself, to younger officials in his party, John Tembo, and in a very small group. Plenty of corruption there but it wasn't rampant amongst the general public. An unfortunate aspect of the development of democracy in Malawi was that corruption also became increasingly democratic, with much wider participation. Most of it was petty stuff but nonetheless, you could see this as a very negative trend, particularly in a country that is one of the poorest in the world. This could be quite a plague on the country.

There was an individual who was named to the cabinet who prior to being named to the cabinet had been found guilty of misdirecting a small grant from AID. He had been charged and gone to court and found guilty. His punishment required that he repay the money that he had stolen. Well, he did not comply and then of course, once he became a member of the cabinet, his membership in the cabinet was used as a defense against his need to comply with any order from the court. I went as far as talking to the chief justice about this and basically got a shrug of the shoulders. I really didn't get any answer.

And so, I took that issue to Muluzi and we had a number of conversations about this to the point where he got quite tired of hearing me talk about it. And so, he named a senior member of his staff to be a special envoy to the ambassador on the issue of the alleged corruption of so and so. I never gave up on the subject and as long as I was there, Muluzi never budged on it. But I had hardly been gone when said minister was sacked. And I don't know if he ever did actually pay back the money but anyway, he was out of his ministerial position, and I will take some credit for that.

Q: Now, talk about the extensive Peace Corps program. How long had it been there and what kinds of issues were covered?

CHAVEAS: Well, that Peace Corps program dated back to the '60s. It was one of the earliest Peace Corps programs. In fact, if you are interested and aware of the author Paul Theroux, amongst other things, he wrote all kinds of train travel books. He is still an active writer. One of his earliest books was about his experience as a Peace Corps

volunteer in Malawi. The biggest proportion of the volunteers in Malawi over time have been teachers. They were very pervasive throughout the educational system in Malawi. And another, particularly as AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] became more and more of an issue, they were out doing health AIDS awareness type programs. And there were a variety of other things but by a long shot, education at various levels was the biggest activity that they were involved in.

I should tell a story here about Paul Theroux in particular. Lucille and I met Paul Theroux shortly before we went out to Malawi. He gave a talk at the National Geographic headquarters in Washington which we attended. We introduced ourselves afterwards and said, we were headed for Malawi, and gave him an open-ended invitation, "If you ever find yourself with an opportunity to return to Malawi, please keep us in mind and we would be happy to offer you hospitality".

I made it a habit from the very start in Malawi of holding an event, a special event, each time that a new group of volunteers came to Malawi and completed their training. I would swear in the volunteers. I would administer the oath to all the new volunteers and I would give a talk and then I would seek out some Malawian who had a special connection to the Peace Corps. Well, the first year, the Malawian in question was Justin Malewezi, the vice president. I did that because as a student at Columbia University, he had made money during the summer by teaching *Chichewa*, the local language, to Peace Corps volunteers in the United States before they came to the country. The second year, I invited the then minister of education because as I said, the biggest portion of the volunteers were teachers. This individual had earlier in his career been the headmaster of the most prestigious secondary school in Blantyre. And he had been the first Malawian to fill that role. It had always been filled by whites before that. There was a long succession of Brits who had filled that position and some PCVs.

A couple of weeks before we were going to have the ceremony in which this minister would be the prime Malawian speaker, I got a call from Paul Theroux. He was in Zambia and he was writing a piece for the National Geographic about the tributaries of one of the major rivers in southern Africa, the Zambezi passes through Malawi. "Oh, by the way, can I take you up on your invitation?". And I said, "Well, of course Paul. We would love to see you". He was traveling with two other people, and I said to him, "You know, your visit is going to coincide with this event that we are going to be having for the Peace Corps volunteers. Would you be willing to be a speaker and tell them about your experiences in Malawi?". Well, he jumped at that. He thought that it was a wonderful idea.

On the day itself, his flight was delayed and so the ceremony started without him. But while the minister was speaking, I saw Paul come in the backdoor of the auditorium and he took a seat in the back. None of the volunteers, none of the Peace Corps staff knew anything about his visit. After the minister has completed his remarks, I took the microphone back and I started to list three or four of Paul Theroux's books and I said, "If any of you are familiar with these books, you know that the author Paul Theroux was a Peace Corps volunteer here in Malawi back in the '60s. Paul, would you come up and

please talk to the volunteers about your experience here?"'. Which he did and all concerned had a wonderful time. I think he had the most wonderful time but in the course of the after-ceremony conversations, it came up that Paul Theroux had been the last white headmaster of the school that the minister took over. So anyway, we had a great event there related to the Peace Corps. Paul Theroux. Paul stayed on for a couple more days. And then, with the assistance of our USIS office, we got him down to southern Malawi where he got into the river so he could finish his work on his article.

Q: No crocodiles, I suppose.

CHAVEAS: There are crocodiles, believe me.

Q: Now, in addition to the Peace Corps, you were saying that the AID mission was quite extensive?

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: How many people were assigned there? What were some of the programs?

CHAVEAS: Oh Lord, I am afraid I can't put a number on the personnel but it was quite a substantial number of Americans and local personnel. And of course, given the way that AID operates, or at least did then, there was a constant flow of short-term consultants in and out. The biggest focus of our AID program was on the fact that Malawi is as poor a country as it is because it is landlocked. Its only access to the sea was via a single-track railroad out through the northern part of Mozambique, which was having its own war for several years before, which created some peril there. We can talk a bit later about our military assistance programs related to that.

Anyway, the Malawian economy was very heavily dependent on the cultivation of tobacco. The reason being that tobacco was a lightweight, high-value crop, and therefore could be moved at less cost and still bring in significant income. In addition, the soils and temperate climate was conducive to the growth of tobacco. Tobacco cultivation, however, had been very, very controlled under the Banda regime. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of the benefits from growing tobacco were going to people of political prominence. It just really wasn't getting to the average Malawian. So, the program that AID spent an awful lot of effort on involved opening up that market. Getting the Malawian government to increasingly get out of the business of growing tobacco, and instead, supporting its smaller farmers in their own efforts to grow tobacco.

We didn't do this with the idea of promoting the growth of tobacco. That just happened to be the crop that was critical to Malawi's economy and already well established. The focus of our effort was making that economy more open to a much larger number of Malawians and giving them participation, and income from that particular crop. This was not, of course, without controversy in Washington. We were seen, whether it was our intention or not, perceived as promoting the growth of tobacco at a time when we were well past the

surgeon general's report about the health impacts of smoking. And so, it always took some creative defending of this program to keep it going.

And I remember one week; this was one single week in which I received two telephone calls from lieutenants of Senator Jesse Helms from North Carolina. One of these came from his office in Washington and to berate me for this program in which we were promoting the growth of tobacco. Something that by the way was still grown quite extensively in North Carolina. "Why were we spending the U.S. taxpayers' dollars on promoting the sale of tobacco?" So, I dealt with that conversation as best I could. A few days later, I got a call from the senator's office in North Carolina. Could I please help facilitate the access of a particular tobacco buyer from North Carolina to the auction house for tobacco in Malawi? In other words, could I help the North Carolinian get access to some of the business of tobacco growing in Malawi? No contradiction there. Anyway, the program I think was quite successful. But some years after I left, it did ultimately run squarely into the buzzsaw of anti-tobacco forces and politics in this country and AID was forced to shut it down. As I say, that was well after my departure.

AID also had a number of programs in conjunction with some of the things that the Peace Corps Volunteers were doing to expand opportunities for young women and girls in education. We had programs that were both, I think, very good programs but not terribly successful at that time to try and deal with the horrible, horrible crisis of HIV-AIDS in Malawi that was just killing hundreds and hundreds of Malawians every day, running up against levels of ignorance about the subject and how the disease was caused, and how it was spread. That, of course, has changed since I was there mostly because of programs like the PEPFAR [United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief] program, which have made antivirals very widely available. But boy, we were flowing against the tide when I was there.

When I later became ambassador to Sierra Leone, I put a lot of emphasis on this subject in no small part because of my experience in Malawi. Fortunately, in Sierra Leone, the problem was not nearly as acute because there were some very different cultural practices. In Malawi, there was for instance the local tradition of cleansing of a widow. It was their tradition that if a man died, there was a requirement that his widow be cleansed and that meant having intercourse with a relative of the deceased. Well, of course, if the deceased had passed away because of HIV-AIDS, it was quite likely that his wife also was HIV positive. Therefore, that whole tradition was an extraordinary vector for passing the disease along. That tradition didn't exist in Sierra Leone.

Q: Now, of course, there were other ways to become infected but did the embassy mission personnel have a problem? Did you have to evacuate anybody?

CHAVEAS: No, I can't recall anybody on the American staff ever running into that. We did have a terrible problem though amongst our national staff. There were some cases of them contracting the disease. There was also another problem I remember very vividly. One day, I announced at our regular country team meeting, "Today, there is only one problem we are going to talk about", and it turned into a very lengthy meeting. We had

staff who were constantly absent from their work, not because they had the disease but because somebody in their family, somebody in their close community had died from the disease. This was virtually a daily occurrence. And in Malawi, if you were not present for the funeral of a relative, of a close friend or associate, there was tremendous stigma attached to that. It was simply impossible for these people not to attend those funerals.

So, our discussion in this meeting was dealing with very, very high levels of absenteeism. Should we be doing something like saying, you can only be absent for this purpose for a certain number of days, and then you start losing pay. We ultimately came to the conclusion that no, this was just something that we were going to have to live with because those people would have sooner lost their employment than miss one of these funerals. It was just impossible for them within their society to do that.

We had a tremendous Malawian personnel officer at that time who was very, very good at guiding us through this and teaching us about what the customs were and what the constraints on our local employees were. I found it really rough because an awful lot of people were dying. I came to know that my driver was HIV positive. He didn't manifest any symptoms while I was there but it was not too long after I left that Fred passed away. And Fred was almost part of the family. He was a wonderful hardworking guy and a great loss.

Q: Did you get any support from the State Department? Did they come out with instructions or personnel from time to time to see how you were doing?

CHAVEAS: We had a resident nurse practitioner. A tremendously good nurse practitioner, and also a Peace Corps doctor. And in addition, the British had a doctor on their mission. We had excellent lab facilities, a very good Malawian lab technician and the British also had some facilities. We made them very freely available to each other so, in that respect, we felt pretty well taken care of medically, I don't recall anything particular from the Department with regard to HIV-AIDS. It may well have been there but given what we had available to us in country, I don't think we felt the need too much. In addition, one of the advantages of Malawi was that South Africa was very accessible to us. If there was some kind of an emergency that required a higher level of medical care facilities in South Africa, we were not that far away.

Q: Alright, going back to AID, for a moment you were discussing some of the programs. The AID director at that time that you were there— Was there almost the full time that you were there, was she there? Did she come with you or was she already there?

CHAVEAS: Cynthia Rozzell was already there when I arrived but just barely. She hadn't been there very long, and she left pretty much the same time as I did. She went on to be mission director in Mozambique.

Q: So, she was very senior in the AID structure?

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: You were saying earlier that USIS also had a significant presence down in the shopping center. What kinds of programs were they working on?

CHAVEAS: Well, I think, the thing that had the biggest impact, as it did in other places that I served, was the library. There weren't a whole lot of similar resources available anywhere in the country. And so, a lot of students, a lot of adults took advantage of that. We periodically had films available. We had the International Visitors Program under which we picked out individual Malawians that we thought could benefit from some kind of exposure to the United States. Also, we had two Fulbrighters, both history professors---a married couple---who taught at the University of Malawi down in Zomba. And they had children with them. They needed some good connectivity to our mission and Bob Dance [Robert Dance] who was the PAO [public affairs officer] made it kind of his special, personal mission to make sure that those people were taken care of. I really commend him for all the miles he put in going back and forth to Zomba to make sure that they were properly supported.

I should also mention another AID program. This was an AID program that had existed in many parts of Africa in the '60s, which I believe we unfortunately got much too far away from. I think it may have functioned elsewhere in the developing world but I am only familiar with Africa. We would not infrequently identify promising individuals and send them to university in the United States. They would get a full university education in the United States and then come back to their countries and contribute in whatever appropriate way. A beautiful example of that was Mathews Chikaonda, a fellow that I became quite close to. He unfortunately passed away not too long ago.

Mathews had gone to undergraduate school in the United States on such an AID scholarship to study economics. He graduated at a time when it was becoming increasingly clear how repressive the Banda regime was, and how little scope there was going to be for somebody with his kind of training to function. And he managed, I'm not sure if it was AID money or other foundation money, but anyway, eventually he received his PhD from a school in the United States, and then taught in the United States for a time. By the time that the Banda regime was replaced, he was teaching at a university in Canada. Well, with the change of regime in Malawi, he came back to be the deputy governor of their Central Bank, with the understanding that the governor was going to retire in the not too distant future, and that he, Matthews, would become the governor. This was an incredibly good investment. He provided a level of sanity in that government that could not have been provided by anyone else, and certainly not by any outsiders.

In addition to that, he became a close personal friend. His wife and my wife became quite close. Lucille would have his American children---because his children had been born in the States---over every so often for things like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. And Lucille and Violet became good friends. And I used to say that whenever I came up against an economic issue that I was having trouble getting a grasp on, I would call Mathews and I would go to his office and we would sit over a cup of coffee for a couple of hours, and I would go away understanding it fully along with learning a great deal

more. U.S. taxpayer money had been very well spent. Some years later, Mathews went on to be the head of something called the Press Corporation, which was in fact a government institution which owned a wide swath of economic activities in the country. And then in 2006 or 07, I am retired from the Foreign Service but I am the director of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. We went to Malawi to conduct one of our programs. And Mathews was the keynote speaker. He later visited us in Germany while he was still pursuing some of his responsibilities as governor of the Central Bank. And as I say, unfortunately passed away a couple of years ago now.

Q: Shifting subjects a little bit, what was the diplomatic community like?

CHAVEAS: It was quite small. I described earlier how the donors had come together to put pressure on the Banda government to open up its political process. But before that had ever taken place, many of the diplomatic missions had left Malawi, and had withdrawn their assistance activities. A large number of NGOs [non-government organizations] that had significant history in Malawi had withdrawn their activities. Not so much in consort with what the United States and the UK [United Kingdom] and others were doing, but simply because they found the environment intolerable and unproductive.

So, by the time I got there, the diplomatic community was pretty darn small. There was a South African presence and a Zimbabwean presence, both close neighbors to our residence. It also happened that both of them lived across the street from us. The British maintained a significant presence. The EU [European Union] was there, the UN [United Nations] was there. The French were there, although they closed their mission there after we'd been there a year or two.

Interestingly enough, the Taiwanese were there. This was, at that point, one of the very few countries that still recognized the Taiwanese as the legitimate government of China. I found this particularly interesting to watch because, of course, I couldn't formally interact with the Taiwanese ambassador. However, not too long after we arrived, he became the doyen of the diplomatic corps. And in that capacity, I could interact with him and I did to a limited extent. One of the functions that the doyen would conduct was a periodic dinner of all of the chiefs of mission. It was held at a Chinese restaurant in town. The quality of the Chinese food at those dinners was always well above the quality that you would receive if you just walked in as an average patron to that restaurant.

Every time that a chief of mission departed post, there was a well understood procedure. One of these dinners would be held and the departing chief of mission would receive a gift from his colleagues. The gift was a very standard item, an engraved silver platter. We all knew where it was purchased and how much it cost because we each were expected to contribute our share. Every time, as months went by, as the chiefs of mission would leave, the same silver platter would be presented. When my time came to leave, there was another chief of mission leaving at the same time. So, dinner was thrown for us jointly. First of all, the Taiwanese Ambassador called up the other ambassador to say farewell and gave him the standard platter. Then he called up the American. His speech was much

more effusive than anything that had been heard before and the platter in question was much larger.

Another aspect of this was that the Malawians knew how to play the Taiwanese. They knew that the Taiwanese particularly valued their relationship with their country because there were so few of them that recognized the Taiwanese in Africa. So, every so often, it would leak from the State House or from the foreign ministry or wherever that the Malawians were contemplating switching their allegiance. And all of a sudden, there would be this flood of new Mercedes, gifts to the government, delegations from Taiwan on this, that or the other subject, and some significant uptick in assistance in an effort to keep the Malawians on that particular reservation. I saw that happen at least twice in the time I was there. Eventually, the Malawians did recognize the government in mainland China but that was some time after I left.

Q: Now, who were, I suspect that the government was very modest. Who were your main interlocutors?

CHAVEAS: Well, as I have already mentioned, I had a lot of discussion with the president and with the vice president. The speaker of the House was a frequent interlocutor. The finance minister also because I, pretty much in tandem with our AID director, was trying to guide some aspects of their financial activities. But also, because I knew him to be a major political player in the government, well beyond his finance duties. I previously expressed concerns with government mismanagement or even corruption. It came to my attention along the way that the president of Malawi had become rather enamored of the idea of a presidential aircraft. He did in fact have a small aircraft but it was something that could only get him to South Africa but not any further than that. I was on it once or twice and it certainly was not luxurious. He had the opportunity to fly on the aircraft of a few neighboring presidents and it was clear that he was salivating over the idea of having a new presidential aircraft that would treat him better and get him further.

Having gotten wind of this and knowing that this would be a financial disaster for the budget, I called up the finance minister, Aleke Banda, one night, because I knew he was an ally on the subject. I said to him, "Aleke, you have my permission, if you find it useful during discussions of this airplane, to make it known that I would immediately recommend to Washington that our AID programs be reduced by an amount equal to the cost of that aircraft if they were ever to go through with such a deal". I don't know whether he used that argument or not, but I do know that that the purchase of the aircraft did not take place

I also tried, not always very successfully, to maintain a dialogue with John Tembo. I have mentioned his name before. In the waning years of the Banda administration, because Banda was as old as he was and often showing signs of senility, one was never entirely sure who was really making the decisions. Was it John Tembo or was it Banda? As a result of that, I made a number of efforts to create some kind of dialogue with Tembo. We did have a number of conversations. They were pretty cold and I don't think they were

very productive. He obviously held the United States to blame for the change that had taken place. But I kept trying. I also ultimately met with Banda. This was pretty late in my tenure. I kept raising with Muluzi in some of our conversations, it was never my primary subject but I would just kind of throw it in, asking him if he ever considered, perhaps as a gesture of reconciliation, calling on Banda as the former president? And he would usually tell me, "Well, I'm seriously considering that. But it wouldn't happen, it wouldn't happen".

I also talked to my British colleague frequently about this because Banda still had quite a constituency in the UK, mostly former civil servants who had served in Malawi and were rather attached to Banda. John Martin, who I already knew well, we had been counterparts in Lagos years before. John was quite sensitive on this subject and I think appreciated the fact that I kept him apprised of my conversations with Muluzi. But ultimately, I made it known to both Muluzi and to John Martin that I was going to call on Banda, hoping to prompt a call by Muluzi to preempt what I was doing. He didn't take that bait and I went ahead with a meeting with Banda. It was held in the small, not so small, palace that he lived in in Blantyre. He was quite deaf at that point and I had to speak to him through his doctor. The doctor had come in before Banda came into the room and briefed me on the fact that the president was, he still called him, "His Excellency, the President", and briefed me on the fact that I was going to have to speak quite loudly.

Well, even when I spoke quite loudly, Banda was not hearing much. The doctor would take what I was saying and repeat it. It was clear that Banda was just attuned to his voice and could understand what was being said at that point. I had a fairly lengthy conversation with Banda. He reminisced with some precision about the years that he had spent in the United States. He had gone to medical school in the United States and to undergraduate school and had some fond memories from that. On the other hand, I was never clear during that conversation whether he fully understood that he was no longer the president. There were just bits of the conversation where that seemed to get through to him and others where it did not. It was a strange conversation. In the wake of that visit, my British colleague did call on him. And then Muluzi, after I had left, made a call as well. And then of course, Banda didn't survive a whole lot longer after that. But he was a hundred years old, they could document that at the time of his death, that he was a hundred.

Q: Now with all your contacts, you have an econ commercial officer and consular-political officer. The political officer? What did you have her do in the mission?

CHAVEAS: Well, to tell you the truth, you know, I look at that initial personnel list that you gave me. I know that a number of those people rotated out the very summer that I arrived. Some of them were already gone. Some of them I might have overlapped with very briefly so many of them, I don't remember. The next personnel list which you sent me for 1996 is much more akin to the lineup that I remember. I remember Bernie Link for instance, who was the consular officer, principally consular. Between myself, our AID director, the DCM, we had the political side of things pretty well covered. I don't recall

Bernie doing a great deal of what you would call political work. There was a fair amount of consular work but it was all pretty routine stuff. I don't remember any particular incidents, Americans arrested or anything of that variety.

I should mention here, Karen Levine, who was the econ/commercial officer who remains a good friend. We just saw her recently. Karen identified labor as a particularly interesting activity. There was a nascent, and I mean nascent, labor union movement developing in the country. It developed in no small part because of the encouragement that Karen gave it, giving the folks involved a lot of time, and giving them some access to some training. I think we may have sent one of the nascent labor leaders off to the States on an International Visitor Program, I'm not sure of that. But anyway, she particularly did some fine work in that area. On the commercial side, there wasn't a lot of American investment in Malawi but there was some important stuff. Most importantly, Cargill had a maize processing plant in Blantyre which opened while we were there, and that was a not insignificant investment in this very, very poor country.

Q: Now when you arrived, Greg Engle was the DCM.

CHAVEAS: Right

Q: And then he surely moved on and your new DCM was an old friend from AF/S, right? Moosa Valli.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, Moosa had been the Zambia desk officer while I was in AF/S. But before we got off of Greg, Greg was a tremendous asset. He really knew the scene. He had been there through the transition. He had actually witnessed all of that and was really invaluable to me. I really, really appreciate it. I can't remember the exact timeline, but Greg went on to be fairly briefly ambassador to Togo and then was purloined away to be the admin counselor in Baghdad during that fiasco. Greg is still very involved in Africa. He later went back to be the Peace Corps director, I believe in Ethiopia. And also subsequent to his retirement from the Foreign Service, he has been to Africa several times under U.S. government auspices as a performer. He and a colleague are a singing and guitar playing duo and they have done several stints in Africa along the way.

Q: Did you particularly pick his successor?

CHAVEAS: Well, Moosa was on the list that I was given. It didn't hurt that we already knew each other from past activities. Moosa had a good deal of experience on the admin side in his past, which was very, very valuable. You know, we had a variety of problems in that area that challenged us. Both he and before him, Greg, were really effective in using the annual---what did we call a country planning exercise---as a way of making sure that the mission as a whole, all elements of the mission, understood what we were about. They both held really good meetings with the full participation of the different elements of the mission to put together that planning exercise. I will never forget, I think it was when Moosa was in charge of one of those, I just happened to be standing outside his office when one of those meetings broke up.

One of the AID folks came out of that meeting. He said something along the lines of, "That was a great meeting, I finally got it. I finally understand what we're all---"all" meaning, as a mission in its entirety---are about". That kind of thing was invaluable. We had different elements of the mission and we weren't always on the same identical vision of what it was that we were about, but those kinds of exercises, which the DCMs, both of them along the way, led, were particularly valuable in that.

Q: I _____ one of them was an interesting time for Americans, July 4th? How did you organize that?

CHAVEAS: Well, we always had an enormous reception. I described the residence earlier. It had beautiful, beautiful grounds and July 4th fell during the dry season in Malawi so we didn't have to worry about the threat of rain. My wife, over the years, will tell you that there was no day on the entire calendar that she hated more than the Fourth of July. But there was no day on the calendar, in any number of posts, where she delivered so much as a Foreign Service spouse. She would make sure that every such event was a big event. She would make sure that we had some variation of American food available, not always a simple thing in a remote location like Lilongwe. She would come up with original ideas to make the event authentically American. For instance in Malawi, she discovered that there was a member of the Dutch community who played piano very well and was greatly enamored of American musical show tunes. He knew them all.

So, she recruited him, and we rolled the piano that was in the residence out onto our veranda. And all through the reception line, this Dutchman was playing all these American show tunes. Everything was impeccably decorated. I mean, I can't praise her too highly for what she repeatedly put together for those kinds of events. But the first year that we were there, I might call the Fourth of July my public coming out on the subject of corruption. As is usual, there was some senior Malawian official there. I don't remember who it was in particular. It was not the president. But anyway, the Malawian speaker gave the usual kind of speech at such an event. And I did my speech and I harped on the threat of corruption, extensively.

Two things that I remember that came out of that. Number one, after the speech was over and I was circulating amongst the visitors, I got into a small circle with my British colleague and John said, "That was a really inspiring speech. But then, you have an unfair advantage". I said, "What is that?". He says, "You get to quote Thomas Jefferson". Second, and I got this secondhand but from a very good source, was that the first topic of discussion in the next cabinet meeting after that speech, was the speech. It was not discussed necessarily in a positive manner. It was not a subject they wanted to hear about, but I never saw any negative repercussions, and they were reminded of the subject repeatedly.

I had already more privately made a mark with Muluzi and members of the cabinet on this subject the previous December. I had only been in country three months or so. There

was an annual meeting in Paris of donors to Malawi, along with senior government officials, overseen by the World Bank. This was a fairly standard kind of activity for developing African countries where donors were a big factor. Anyway, I went out to the airport, to the VIP [very important person] lounge where I knew everybody going to this event would be gathered. My EU colleague was there, my British colleague, the UN Res Rep and so on, and a whole gaggle of senior Malawian officials. Eventually, we were called to go out to the aircraft, and we got to the bottom of the stairs. We started trooping up the stairs, the Malawians went first. They all got up the stairs and turned left into first class. All the donor representatives minus one, turned right into business class. And one of them went up into the economy, yours truly.

Anyway, after the meetings were all over and I came back a week or so later and had a meeting with the president, I mentioned this event. I didn't talk about me going up in the economy at all, but I said, "Mr. President, this was a meeting of donors and we know how much importance you attach to the donors. Don't you think it creates an unfortunate optic if all of your personnel, all your ministers are flying first class while the donors are further back in the plane? And then, your representatives go up to Paris and ask for more assistance". He took that on board and again, second hand but from a good source, I learned that at the next meeting, he declared to the entire cabinet that no member of government would ever again fly first class out of Malawi. Wow, what a victory. It was not too long after that that I learned that yes, they were all flying down to Johannesburg on business class, and getting on first class in Johannesburg where none of the donors were likely to see them! We're going to run out of time here but if I might tee up as a starting point for our next session.

Q: Sure.

CHAVEAS: I really do want to address, it is not a big subject but it is an important one, our military involvement with the Malawians.

Q: Right, because you were saying Mozambique is right next door.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay, well, we can cover that next time. Quickly, I have been wanting to ask you, the UNGA [United Nations General Assembly] sessions in October are generally pretty busy times for desk people. You get instructions to démarche on UNGA issues while you are in Malawi?

CHAVEAS: Always, always. I mean, there was a very standard packet of issues that we considered of priority concern that we were supposed to démarche our host government on. To my mind, it was always a classic example of how when everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. I mean, the laundry list was just so extensive that there was no way you were going to go over and démarche your foreign minister without having him go to sleep. What I tended to do was pick out the maybe half a dozen that I thought were most relevant. Those were the ones that I would raise face to face, verbally. Then I would leave

behind pieces of paper with respect to the others, as well as the ones that I had raised verbally. Give them some time to digest those. And then, as seemed appropriate, I might go back to them on a particular issue at one time or another.

Q. Much harassment from Washington to keep you in line?

CHAVEAS: No, I'm not sure how fulsome my reporting was on that subject. You didn't have to tell Washington everything. I doubt that they would have been shocked. But anyway, no, I can't remember any feeling of being harassed. I would have to go back to the Niamey story to talk about any harassment. I may have already mentioned that but anyway. In Malawi, I never felt any pressure like that. If I remember correctly, the Malawians were never on the Security Council while I was there.

Q: Aha, that was a key thing.

Q: It is the 9th of September. We are returning to our conversation with Ambassador Chaveas.

Q: We had almost completed your assignment to Malawi. But you had a couple more points that you wanted to make about the military.

CHAVEAS: Yeah, I particularly wanted to talk about the U.S. military engagement with Malawian counterparts. On the bigger world scene, it was hardly a major event but nonetheless, it had a significant history and was quite active while I was there and I think, it contributed positively to our relationship and to Malawi's evolution into democracy. The Malawian Army, although very, very small, had a long history of being reasonably professional and keeping out of politics. I earlier described one incident which occurred the year before I arrived, when the military did get involved in politics and which involved, amongst other things, shooting up the then ruling party's headquarters across the street from the embassy.

But aside from that, the Malawian military had really been very, very apolitical, respectful of civilian authority and reasonably professional. This had really come out in the period when the war in Mozambique was most intense. As I previously described, Malawi was very dependent on a single railroad line that ran from Malawi through Mozambique out to the sea, for most of their exports and imports. And that railroad line was threatened during that war. The United States provided the Malawian military with both armaments and training so that they could defend, which they did successfully, that railroad line throughout that conflict in Mozambique. At the end of that war, they came out of it with the equipment that we had provided, which they took meticulous care of, and which they could account for in detail.

And so, after the war in Mozambique, our special forces continued to train with the Malawians at least once a year. Sometimes twice a year. They would send in a small

team, as I recall, it was maybe six or eight men. And throughout my time, it was always led by the same sergeant and they would exercise with a particular equivalent group within the Malawian military. It was very useful to both sides. The Malawians were getting some first-class training, and our folks were learning more and more about how to operate in an African environment.

During the course of this, an issue that might seem quite separate but where there was a definite connection came up, Malawi, aside from its trade in tobacco, had a burgeoning tourist industry. There are some very nice, small game parks in Malawi. And because Malawi had maintained some kind of relationship with the South Africans, even under apartheid, there were South African investments in Malawi in the tourism sector. Those have since grown quite significantly. But a major threat to that tourism was the poachers who were constantly coming into those parks and threatening their viability. And the park rangers in Malawi largely were not patrolling because they were utterly outgunned. They were operating with World War II vintage, and even earlier vintage weapons, up against these poachers who were taking advantage of the fact that they could get a lot of arms out of Mozambique. And so, the game in the parks was being decimated, particularly the elephants.

During one of the visits of our Special Forces, they happened to have some time off in their schedule. And we worked with them and the Malawi military and the park service to train those rangers, the park rangers, to use the weaponry that we provided to the military. And to give the military enough confidence that the park rangers would make proper use of these armaments---because there was no pre-existing trust between the rangers and the military in Malawi---so, what we did is we arranged some training sessions which were conducted by the Malawi military, not by our folks. Our folks were there as observers and as advisors, but the Malawi military trained the park rangers on the use of the weapons they had received originally from us.

The Malawi military felt this was their initiative. They felt that they developed a relationship with the park rangers and vice versa, where there was a significant element of trust where none had existed before. And henceforth, the park rangers were going into the parks adequately armed and were much more willing to go out and patrol and do their job. And it really had a very, very positive impact on the efficiency of the park service, and hence, a positive impact on the Malawian economy as far as tourism went. Unfortunately, people in Washington decided that we were being a bit too innovative in our use of the special forces team. They had been sent there to do a particular task and we were told to cease and desist and to have them just stick to their assigned tasks whenever they were out there. But this one off really did produce an enduring change in the relationship between Malawi's own military and its own park service, and we were a catalyst for that.

I should also mention the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI). During the time that I was in Malawi, it was of course after the genocide had taken place in Rwanda. There was a growing concern in Washington that there was going to be a repeat performance of that kind of event in neighboring Burundi. And so, Washington decided to take an

initiative which was one of the worst thought out initiatives I ever saw the United States take in Africa---and it is a little hard to explain it because we were not very good at explaining what it was, we intended to do. But basically, it was that we were going to go in, train a bunch of African military forces for intervention in a potential genocide type situation, then they would go off to Burundi and save the situation.

There were teams sent out to various African countries that we thought might be candidates for participation. Lucille and I, by chance, were off on a vacation in Australia at the time the embassy got word that a delegation was coming to present this to the Malawians. We arrived back, very jet-lagged, walked into our living room and there was the DCM [deputy chief of mission] and Bill Twaddell who was the senior DAS [deputy assistant secretary] in AF [Bureau of African Affairs] at that time. Bill had come to present this to the Malawians, and I drank a lot of coffee while I listened to him and tried to recover from my jetlag. Then, we subsequently went off to meet with the Minister of Defense of Malawi, who was also the vice president whom I have talked about earlier, Justin Malewezi.

Justin was very polite in hearing us out. Bill, I think, was very uncomfortable presenting a concept that I don't think was very well thought out by anybody involved, and at the end of the discussion, the vice president basically said, we will think about it. The initiative generally fell flat all across Africa and never really saw the light of day. However, there was a sense in Washington that there was a kernel of possibility in what we were talking about, if we thought about it in terms not of a very short-term response to a particular crisis that we thought was imminent, but rather a longer-term commitment to help Africans build their peacekeeping capabilities so that they had a capacity to respond on their own initiative, to crises around the continent. And this became known as the African Crisis Response Initiative, and a good friend of mine, Marshall McCallie assumed responsibility for that initiative from Washington.

In between, I had a number of opportunities to talk to the defense minister about this as it evolved. I frankly didn't think that I was being any more successful in selling the concept than we had been earlier on. But about a year after the initial presentation, Marshall and a team of others came out to try and present the new concept. And we met with, again, the vice president and defense minister. We had a very good session with him and at the end of that session, to my great surprise, he said, "Count us in". And going forward for a significant period, the Malawians were the only country from southern Africa to participate in that particular initiative. It got better traction in other parts of the continent. I don't know the current state of it but for many, many years, there was a very active program under ACRI to enhance and develop the peacekeeping capability of African military forces. And those forces participated in future peacekeeping operations, including the Malawian units that were trained under that program.

Just two other very quick things about Malawi before we move on. I have mentioned other members of the mission, but I would be most remiss if I did not mention the woman who was my office manager for the first two years that I was there. Kerry Brougham was

the absolute model of what I thought an office manager ought to be and I would gladly have had her continue in that role for the three years that I was in Malawi, and beyond. But towards the end of my second year in Malawi, she came to me somewhat sheepishly, and said, "I have just been approached by the Department under--- what if I recall correctly, was called the Mustang Program---and have been offered the opportunity to become an officer". "But I have an obligation to you", she said. "I have signed on for three years so, I really don't feel that I can do this right now, perhaps after the three years are up". And I said, "Absolutely not. You are going to grab this opportunity and run with it. You are fully capable of performing at that level". And she went off to become an extremely competent consular officer amongst other things. She was the regional officer based out of Frankfurt along the way, who oversaw consular operations all through Central Asia and a good part of Eastern Europe. We remain in close contact with Kerry. She has until recently been doing an awful lot of WAE [Reemployed Annuitant] work. Talked to her as recently as yesterday. Anyway, she went off to have a very successful career as an officer.

And then, the other thing I want to note, earlier on we talked about the fact that coaching Malawi in its efforts to become a more democratic society had been a big part of what I did and what the mission did, during my tenure. I do not think we can draw any real dark, straight lines between the two but in 2019, *The Economist* magazine as well as a number of other institutions, named Malawi as the "Country of the Year", identified as the country that had made the most progress towards solidifying democracy in the entire world, in that period.

The particular focus was on presidential elections that had been held early in the year. The incumbent president was supposedly reelected but it was clearly a very fraudulent election and the opposition took it to court. The Supreme Court of Malawi ordered a rerun of the election and the opposition won resoundingly. First time that anything like that had ever happened in Africa. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, it still has never happened. There have been, I guess, two cases now in Kenya, one of them very recent, in which the Supreme Court of the country heard a challenge to the election results. And in one of those cases, the one several years ago, they actually ordered a rerun of the election. But in that case, the same result came out of that whole process. There was no change of government as a result of it. But anyway, we worked hard to try and encourage democracy in Malawi. How much credit we can take directly, I have no idea, but it seems to have worked in some fashion.

Q: Speaking of embassy staffing, you have talked about before you arrived, the lieutenant colonel who put on his uniform and---

CHAVEAS: Right.

Q: But I was just looking at the staffing for the embassy, that was the last time the embassy had a defense attaché?

CHAVEAS: Well, a resident defense attaché.

Q: Right.

CHAVEAS: The lieutenant colonel that I was talking about earlier, Blue Keller, was still in Malawi for at least the first year that I was there. And then, we managed to create an unusual reorganization. We knew that we were going to lose our resident defense attaché. The numbers were being reduced in Africa and under the normal arrangements, we would have been covered by the defense attaché in Harare, Zimbabwe. But we made a special arrangement to instead have us covered by the defense attaché in Mozambique.

The reason being that Blue Keller, when he left Malawi, went to Maputo to become the defense attaché there. He had developed such extraordinary relationships with the Malawian military that we wanted to milk that situation for all we could. And so, Blue continued to be the defense attaché, if not the entire time I was there, at least almost to the end. Subsequently, Malawi was covered by the fellow in Harare.

Q: It was interesting we are talking about military things because your next assignment after Malawi was as political adviser to an American military command. How did that opportunity come up?

CHAVEAS: There was no plan whatsoever. As I was getting towards the point where I was thinking seriously about what I was going to do after Malawi, George Moose, still the assistant secretary at that point, let it be known that he would not support any repeat ambassadorships in Africa. He did make one exception to that, but otherwise, he didn't want folks who had just completed an ambassadorship in Africa to have an immediate onward assignment to the same job somewhere else in Africa. I had harbored, and my wife also harbored, for many years a desire to spend some time in southern Asia. And we had bid on some jobs in both India and Pakistan in the past but for a variety of reasons, those never took place.

So, I bid on the DCM position in New Delhi, and lo and behold, as the personnel system ground on in the way it tends to grind on, I found myself being told that I was the candidate of the Bureau. So, I started reading more books about India than I had before. But the assignment was not finalized, was not finalized and dragged on and on and on. I wasn't getting any very clear answers to what was holding things up. And then, at one point, I was planning a trip to the most northern part of Malawi and I knew that communications up there would be very, very sparse. So, I had a conversation with Gib Lanpher, who was the senior deputy in the Southern Asia Bureau at the time, and I said, "I am planning on taking this trip. Is it likely that this assignment issue is going to come to a head next week, because I would prefer to be somewhere close to a useful telephone when this is happening".

He assured me that, no, there was not going to be any decision in the coming week. So, I went off on my trip. I got back from the trip to discover that somebody else had been assigned to that position. Actually, what happened was rather than choose a new candidate, they had decided to reshuffle some personnel within the mission in New Delhi.

As best as I could determine, what went on was that after much time, the Secretary's office---this is Madeleine Albright's office---had become directly involved in the issue and had decided that they did not want somebody with no experience in India in that position at this particular time. The reason being that there was no ambassador and hence, I would have become the chargé immediately. And the Secretary was planning a visit, which would have taken place almost immediately after I would have arrived.

What was not revealed at that time was that the president, President Clinton would also visit India not too long after that. I must say that reasoning made a lot of sense to me. You would want somebody with more experience on the ground than I would have had at that point. But what really annoyed me about it was how opaque the whole process proved to be and why I could not have been told these things much earlier in the assignment cycle, mystifies me to this day. Anyway, suddenly, very late in the assignment cycle, having held out for this position, I found myself without a job. And there was not a whole lot remaining that was all that appealing by that time.

But it just so happened that we in the following week or so, were receiving a visit from the Air Force four-star who was the deputy commander at EUCOM [United States European Command]. He was just coming to Malawi as a person in his position did, periodically to countries where we had some kind of military involvement. His political advisor, who was Joe Wilson [Joseph C. Wilson]---that name may ring a bell---was supposed to be up there for another year but had the possibility of moving back to Washington to take up a position on the National Security Council staff. And so, that job was going to be vacant. Joe was very anxious to find somebody who could fill it quickly, and so, when the general came down with Joe, we had some conversations, and it was agreed that I would move on to that assignment.

Q: That is how a lot of assignments come up---that delay, delay, and then what is left in the basket? Did them myself. I take it from that, that save the conversation with Joe, you really didn't have a strong idea of what the job was or what it required?

CHAVEAS: No, I didn't. I had some interaction, very limited really, with Joe prior to that while he was in the position, and also with one of his predecessors. And way back when I was the DCM in Niger, I had spent a week at European Command because one of my duties in Niger was that I was in charge of the military training program that we had for the Nigeriens. I had to go up and get some training on how to administer that. So, that was my visibility with respect to the European Command, and in particular, the job of political advisor.

Q: Now, Joe, was in the Africa Bureau for about a few assignments.

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: This job of political adviser to a military command is a very crucial part of getting the diplomatic community and the military community aware of each other---

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: ---and how to make themselves useful. Obviously, the EUCOM guys have had a string of Polads so, they knew what they should expect but what was the area of coverage? Because at that time, there wasn't an AFRICOM [United States Africa Command].

CHAVEAS: Right, right. Well, I should say that Joe had been recruited to the job and I subsequently was recruited to the job, first and foremost, because we had African background. The command at that time was responsible, of course, for military activities in Europe but also for most of the African continent. It was not responsible for Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, that part of the continent, but otherwise---or of Madagascar and some of the island nations---actually, responsibility for Africa at that time was divided amongst three different U.S. commands. But the bulk of it was the responsibility of European Command and because the United States over the years had had so little involvement militarily in Africa, there were very few people in uniform who had experience with the continent. Therefore, the political adviser played a special role with respect to operations and activities in Africa.

I was expected to provide the background that they didn't have because they had not served there. They didn't know, they had not been on the ground. That said, I became quite involved in a number of other non-African issues but Africa was an awfully big slice of the pie with respect to my work. Beyond that, I would say that the one thing I spent the most time on was keeping our embassies and the headquarters in touch with each other, aware of each other, just generally informed about each other's activities. One of the things that I did, and frankly I was kind of surprised that it had not already been an established procedure, was I would track very closely nominations for ambassadorships to countries in our area of responsibility.

One of the first things that would happen when a new ambassador was identified is he would get a phone call from me, or she would get a phone call from me. "Congratulations and I hope very much that you will make a point of coming to European Command headquarters, either on your way to post or very soon after you arrive at post". So, I spent no small part of my time shepherding new ambassadors around the headquarters to give them exposure to what the headquarters was doing, what the headquarters had to offer them, and in many cases, what the headquarters was already involved in in their various countries of assignment.

Q: Now, EUCOM is centered in Stuttgart, Germany.

CHAVEAS: Right.

Q: What was your housing arrangement and the office that you went to?

CHAVEAS: Well, the headquarters is located on Patch Barracks. Aside from the operational headquarter facilities, there is housing there for a whole array of personnel. The most senior personnel live on Florida *Strasse* (street). All of the streets on the

barracks had interesting American names. A lot of our military there lived outside the barracks on the economy, but my wife and I lived on Florida *Strasse*. I was treated as the equivalent of a lieutenant general from a protocol standpoint. One of the glories of the job was that I could walk to work in about five minutes. My office, to indicate something of the value of the political advisor, was only maybe fifty steps away from the deputy commander's office, just down the hall. With two of the three DCINCs [deputy commander-in-chief] that I worked with, I developed close, positive, personal relationships. I am still in close contact with two of them.

Q: Were the officers you were working with, had they gone through schooling with foreign service officers, the War College, that sort of thing? Or were you their first FSO [foreign service officer]?

CHAVEAS: There were a number that had gone through the War College or other training experiences with FSOs, but it was very interesting to learn over the time that I was there what senior officers thought we did and how they valued it. And my shorthand is that they didn't really have a good grasp of what we did in our careers, but they knew they wanted to know about it. They thought that we had some secret sauce that was valuable to them. And of course, that meant a big part of my job was to translate that secret sauce into something that worked for them.

One particular event sticks out in my mind. I had probably been there for about two years. The deputy commander at that point was Navy Admiral Steve Abbott, who remains a good friend. We were on a trip to Mali and we had gone through a day of visits with various senior Malian officials. We had gone through a formal briefing out at the embassy, and at the end of the day, the embassy had organized a very informal dinner at a local restaurant with a wide swathe of folks from the mission. There were AID [United States Agency for International Development], personnel there, there were USIS [United States Information Service], there were Peace Corps, and it led to a fairly lengthy evening of unstructured conversation. And I remember afterwards, Steve taking me aside and saying, "You have an extraordinarily rich service". He was very impressed by the breadth of knowledge and experience that was represented in that evening's conversation. And so, a lot of what I did was to try to encapsulate what we had to offer in a useful way for the military. I was a translator in many respects, and I think it worked fairly effectively in many cases.

Q: You just mentioned the travel with the deputy commander, I would expect that there were a number of trips. In going from Stuttgart to Africa, that is four or five hours that you have that individual alone and are able to chat and share.

CHAVEAS: Yes, indeed. When I look back over the time, I estimated that I was traveling roughly forty percent of the time. Now, that was not exclusively to Africa. In a bit, I will get on and talk about some of the other things I focused on, because even though I was there, first and foremost, because I had an Africa background, that is not all the POLAD had to deal with. In fact, there were a number of things that were every bit as big or bigger. But yeah, it gave me the opportunity to talk more informally with the DCINC and

with others who were on our plane. I remember one particular conversation, again it was with Admiral Abbott, very near the end of his time in that position. We had dinner together, and it was just the two of us. He said, "You know, when I first took up this job two years ago, I knew I was going to have a lot of responsibility with respect to our African area of responsibility. But I wanted to do everything I could to keep that at arm's length". And he said, "I was wrong". That was---I mean, he didn't say "and I thank you for educating me", but that was what I took away from it. That he had really found our travel in Africa to be particularly valuable. A part of the world that he had little or no background in before doing all of this travel.

It occurs to me that there are some basics that I ought to talk about here, and that is in terms of how the command is organized. Because people will look at the title, you know, "Political Adviser to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Forces in Europe", and immediately think of things like the Bosnia conflict that was going on at that time, and everything that surrounded that. In fact, I had very, very little involvement with that except occasionally as a fly on the wall. In Europe, and this has changed significantly since the Africa Command was established, in Europe, we have NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and NATO headquarters, and we have the European Command headquarters. They are in two physically different locations. NATO is based in Belgium and EUCOM in Germany.

The NATO commander is always an American four-star. But he is also, always, the commander of U.S. forces in Europe. So, he was the commander of EUCOM as well as the commander of NATO forces. The three of the four years that I was there, Wesley Clark was the NATO commander and European commander. He spent most of his time in Belgium or elsewhere, doing things that directly related to his NATO mandate. I was not involved in that. He had a separate American foreign service officer who served as his political adviser in that capacity; and other staff that supported him in that regard.

Because of this unusual arrangement at that time, the deputy commander who was based in Germany, in Stuttgart, was also a four-star officer and he was responsible on a day-to-day basis for what American forces were doing. He was particularly responsible for things in areas where NATO was not operating, for instance, Africa but also in places like Israel. This again has changed since I was there but our relations with Israel used to be under European Command, and that was not a NATO activity. That was a bilateral U.S.-Israeli activity.

There was another activity that I became quite involved in, after I had been in Germany for about a year. Washington decided to rearrange a few of the responsibilities of the various commands. Engagement with the Southern Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, which had previously been run out of Washington, became the responsibility of European Command. It was decided that the initial work of making contacts between the command and the militaries, and governments and embassies in those three countries, initially would best be done by a civilian. And so, I became the initial outreach from the command to those three countries. I had been to Georgia before in the Senior Seminar but other than that, it was a very new area to me. So, I started to undertake a fair amount of

travel to those countries to lay a bit of groundwork and then eventually, we had visits by senior military officers.

Q: What you are saying, that Kosovo was a NATO thing?

CHAVEAS: That was a NATO activity. I had occasion to sit in on a couple of planning sessions on that, but it was more a matter of my curiosity than it was me playing any role in any kind of decision making, or any kind of advising. I did, late in my time there, make one visit to Sarajevo with the deputy commander but that was about the extent of my on the ground involvement.

Q: As part of your duties, you might have been put in a position of suggesting that the current idea being kicked around wasn't a good idea. How did, I mean, were there circumstances like that? And how did you handle them?

CHAVEAS: I guess I handled them fairly directly. I found that coming up most frequently with respect to Africa. One of the admirable characteristics of our military in most situations is that they see a problem and their first---although they never call it a problem, they call it a challenge---and having identified a challenge, their immediate reaction is how are we going to fix that? And I can't tell you how many times I had an officer come to me with an idea about what we might do in a particular African situation. And I would respond by saying, best that we sit back and watch for a while. The Africans are going to have to take ownership of this before we can effectively intervene in any way. And maybe, it is not appropriate for us to intervene at all. And I found people receptive to hearing that. But at the same time, I had to repeat it a number of times.

Q: Now, I would assume that the, as you had mentioned earlier, the genocide in Burundi was on everybody's mind.

CHAVEAS: Yeah. Well, you know, the genocide had taken place in Rwanda, and there was this fear of it happening in Burundi. In fact, it never happened. Burundi has not been a very happy place for quite some time and has dealt with some pretty repressive governments, but, fortunately, never rose to the level of what was seen in Rwanda.

Q: Now, the Rwandan situation caused a lot of second guessing, particularly in Washington.

CHAVEAS: Yeah.

Q: I have to assume that, that second guessing brought up other suggestions about what EUCOM should be doing or preparing for?

CHAVEAS: I don't recall. There may well have been. It had been some years since the genocide. What I do recall relates to the African Crisis Response Initiative which was a State activity, a State-led activity, but from time to time was involving our military in providing various kinds of training. ACRI got a lot of support, some of which I

instigated, from senior military officers. I can remember particularly the first DCINC that I worked with, intervening at my request in Washington to indicate support for the African Crisis Response Initiative and for continued U.S. involvement, and for U.S. military support for it.

Q: Now, one of the major functions of the military is to train.

CHAVEAS: Yeah.

Q: Were you involved in any of the major training exercises?

CHAVEAS: Well, I did participate, or observed more correctly in some of them, but there was also one that I am particularly proud of that didn't really materialize until after I had left but it was on the way. While I was at EUCOM, I was invited by one of our senior officers to observe a NATO exercise that we were supporting, in which the various NATO partners, NATO members, as well as the prospective members at that time, would come together to test the interoperability of their communications capabilities. Obviously, in any military operation, it is going to be very important when you have diverse militaries working together that they be able to communicate with each other. And so, over the course of several days, the units of the communication side of these various militaries would come together, go through a training exercise using their own communications capabilities and testing how well they were able to communicate with each other using these different systems.

And it was very, very interesting by and large. We found that things did work quite well together but one thing stood out to me. At the end they would come up with this wire diagram showing how different systems connected and how strongly they connected with each other or not. Always, always, at the end of any exercise, the French box would be kind of to the side. They were connected but it was harder to make it happen. And I thought about this and I thought, "Wait a second, there are an awful lot of countries in Africa who are increasingly working together to conduct peacekeeping operations on their own continent". But a lot of them are Francophone countries with strong connections to France and who use a lot of French equipment. How well are they going to be able to work together in a peacekeeping operation if they are using equipment that attaches rather tenuously to the equipment of their colleagues from non-Francophone countries.

So, I got the ball rolling. I think it was the second year that I was at one of these exercises. We invited a number of African observers to the exercise to give them a chance to assess what this was all about and form their own ideas about the extent to which it might or might not be useful to them. It was shortly after I left but this did lead to a similar exercise involving Africans in Africa, and I thought that was pretty valuable.

Q: Do you recall who replaced you when you moved on?

CHAVEAS: Jim Ledesma had been ambassador in Gabon, just like Joe Wilson had been before me. I was instrumental in having him chosen for the job. I know that the last DCINC that I worked with, a Marine Corps four-star, and Jim worked effectively together. The subsequent DCINC and he did not get along and Jim chose to curtail his assignment

Q: Now, 2001, the Bush administration comes in and this is the time where ambassadorships are opening up. How did the offer come to you to go to Freetown?

CHAVEAS: Well, we need to back up. I originally went to Germany thinking I was going to be there for two years and it ended up being four. The reason for that was---well, there were two reasons. One, I loved the job in Stuttgart. I really came to enjoy it; I came to appreciate the people that I was working with. But I was making an effort to get another chief of mission position. Unfortunately, I knew Susan Rice, who was by then the assistant secretary but I could not claim a close relationship with her. And I don't know this for a fact but I think she came to associate me with Joe Wilson, even though I hardly knew Joe. Susan Rice and Joe Wilson developed a rather bitter relationship. I might have been the victim of some of that fallout.

Anyway, I found that although I was being put on lists by the African Bureau, I was there as filler. They were required to put three names forward. I was never the first name. I would have very much liked to end my career as an ambassador to Nigeria. That didn't happen and that led to me staying on for the fourth year. To more directly answer your question about Sierra Leone, I had never expressed any interest in going to Sierra Leone as an ambassador for two reasons. Number one, it was an unaccompanied post, something that I very definitely did not want. And also, we had very fond memories of our first tour in Freetown. Although I had never returned to Sierra Leone, I had followed developments there. I knew what was happening in the country---a great tragedy---and I wasn't convinced that I wanted to go back and witness any of that firsthand.

But, I had put bids in for a couple of other ambassadorships that particular rotation. I was on a trip to Spain as part of my EUCOM duties in September of 2000. I got a call awfully late at night from personnel asking me if I would agree to be nominated to go to Sierra Leone. My initial reaction was no, but I said, "I need to talk to my wife. I won't be able to do that until tomorrow and I'll get back to you". My wife wasn't thrilled at the prospect either but convinced me that I should accept it. There was, as I later determined, a fairly specific reason why they had reached out to me even though I had not expressed interest in the assignment.

Earlier that year, April or May, the situation in Sierra Leone had deteriorated quite dramatically. The rebels had attacked a UN [United Nations] peacekeeping unit composed of Kenyan and Guinean troops, and held a number of them for quite some time as hostages; killed a few of the Kenyans. And so, it appeared that the entire peacekeeping operation there was on the verge of collapse. At about the same time, the Bureau had already nominated somebody else for Freetown. I didn't know who it was. In fact, I did not come to know until after I was back in Freetown.

Given that particular crisis situation, the powers that be decided that they needed somebody with a different kind of experience, and that was me. It also happened at the same time that Wes Clark made a couple of phone calls on my behalf to some key people in Washington which certainly pushed my name forward. And so, with great hesitation, I agreed that I would go ahead with that assignment. As luck would have it, by the time I actually got on the ground in Freetown, not only had that particular crisis been resolved but there was a solid peace process on the rails, and the war formally came to an end only months after I arrived in Freetown. But anyway, that was the process.

Q: Well, looking at Freetown from EUCOM, you were obviously very aware of what was going on. When you are nominated and you go to the Senate, did those hearings put a particular interest on Sierra Leone and the blood diamonds problem?

CHAVEAS: Yes, I got a lot of questions about the situation, obviously on the ground and the role diamonds had played in it. All of the questions were, I would say, quite predictable. Nothing that I had any particular difficulty in responding to. The thing that stood out for me about that particular event was that I had for some time known Senator Richard Lugar from Indiana because we both went to the same undergraduate school. Many years apart, he graduated ten, twelve years before I did. But throughout his public career, he took a great deal of interest in Denison graduates who were in the public service in any way. His focus was never much on Africa, he was much more interested in questions of nuclear disarmament and the Soviet Union, and also Latin America. But I would see him from time to time and he would certainly pump me for information about what was going on in Africa.

When my hearings were scheduled, I asked him to introduce me, He was unable to do that because of a scheduling conflict but about halfway through the hearing, as I was testifying, he came into the room and took the time to say how proud he was to see a fellow Denisonian in this particular position, and to say that despite other scheduling, he couldn't miss the opportunity to come in and say some positive words. So, I greatly appreciated that.

Before we move on to me in Freetown, I should mention EUCOM and the crisis that I referred to earlier with the Kenyan and Guinean peacekeepers. It just so happened that at the time of that crisis, there was already a scheduled visit to Nigeria by Bill Clinton. The Nigerians had been very involved in the peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone for quite some time, and frankly, had often been more a source of the problem than of the solution. They were often clumsy in their operations. They weren't well trained or equipped for these kinds of activities.

And yet, they were the largest African presence there. And so, in conjunction with Bill Clinton's visit, it was decided that we would offer to train a number of Nigerian, Ghanaian and Senegalese units for the specific purpose of participating in the peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone. And this was early April or at latest May of 2000. This was before I was ever contacted about going to Sierra Leone, I had no hint at

that point that I was going to end up as the ambassador on the ground. But anyway, the U.S. military under the direction of European Command undertook intensive activities to train Nigerian units as well as the Ghanaians and the Senegalese in their own countries, and provide them with equipment and then they served in the UN peacekeeping force in Sierra Leone.

So, I can remember traveling with Carl Fulford, the DCINC at the time, visiting training sites in Nigeria and in the other countries, he developed a particularly good relationship with the colonel in charge of one of the units from Nigeria. That whole exercise went forward, and then I found myself on the ground not much later observing the performance of those very units that had been trained under EUCOM's direction.

And particularly, in the case of the Nigerians, the improvement in their performance was extraordinary. The Nigerian military have had, to say the least, ups and downs in terms of their quality. But that period came to be somewhat of a golden era for the Nigerian military. They made good use of that training, not only while they were in Sierra Leone but in some subsequent peacekeeping operations. That was aided by the fact that the deputy commander of the UN forces in Sierra Leone when I first arrived there, was a Nigerian. An officer of the highest quality, Martin Agwai, who subsequently went on to be the chief of staff of the Army in Nigeria and then after that, the chief of staff of all of their military forces.

Q: Now, at that time that you were doing your hearings, 9/11 [Sept. 11, 2001 World Trade Center attack] occurs. How did that impact your schedule?

CHAVEAS: Well, a couple of things. I went back to Washington very early in July of that year but I was told that I was probably going to have to wait quite a while for my hearings. So, I walked into AF/W the first business day after I got back and asked if they had any idea when I would have my hearings. And they said something like, "this Thursday". Suddenly, a spot had opened up in the schedule and I was going to have hearings immediately, so, a lot of running around to get prepared for that. But now, I found myself the confirmed ambassador to Sierra Leone, with no plans to go to post until very early September. I had some home obligations, particularly surrounding the fact that my wife was going to be staying behind.

But also, our ambassador at that time, Joe Melrose [Joseph Melrose], in Freetown, was very reticent about departing. That took a bit of nudging, I guess you would say. But anyway, I planned to go to post around the first of September. Just before that, we learned that President Kabbah was going to be in the United States the second week of September, to receive an honorary degree at a school in Connecticut I believe. And then, he was going to come to Washington on some calls, so it was decided that it was a better idea for me to stick around and assist in those meetings, and then go out to post a bit later. Well, as it ended up, because of 9/11, he never came to Washington. I traveled around the first of October to Sierra Leone.

There was one particularly poignant experience I had shortly after I got there related to 9/11. We all went through that great trauma of 9/11 and its immediate aftermath. When I left the states and headed for Sierra Leone in early October, I thought I was leaving these thousands of miles behind. The first weekend that I was in Sierra Leone, I was invited by some old friends to go out to the beach. And then afterwards, I did something that Lucille and I had frequently done on Sunday afternoons when we had been there in the '70s. We would go to this one particular restaurant that was right on the beach. Beautiful, beautiful view of the beach, and we would sit at the restaurant and have a beer and maybe some peanuts, and watch the sun disappear. Well, I went out to the same spot, the restaurant was still there. You would not have wanted to eat in it anymore, but you could still get a cold beer and some peanuts.

So, I was sitting there and there was almost nobody else in the restaurant. I ordered my beer and I was there feeling very sorry for myself, and I got to chatting with the waiter. And it transpired that the waiter's sister had emigrated to the United States many years before and became a teacher. A secondary school teacher. And she must have been a very good teacher because that particular year she was chosen as Virginia's "Teacher of the Year". Part of the prize that she received for that recognition was that she was permitted to take a small group of her best students on a trip to California. And so, they got on a plane out of Dulles and the plane went into the Pentagon. And the sister and of course, all of her students were killed. And suddenly, 9/11 was right there, staring me in the face.

Q: Well, sounds like Sierra Leone to begin with, was a pretty difficult circumstance. What was the embassy like and your housing? I mean, you were unaccompanied. Were all your staff unaccompanied?

CHAVEAS: Before we get away from the pol ad job.

Q: Okay.

CHAVEAS: The Africa Center for Strategic Studies was just starting up the last year that I was at European Command. I was not giving the slightest thought, had no inkling of the possibility that I would ever be employed at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. But I was very aware of the program, and the European Command, which had responsibility as we have already discussed, for much of Africa, was invited to send a senior officer to be the final speaker at the two-week event that they were going to hold in Dakar, Senegal. This was their first program, something that they called the Senior Leaders Seminar, which involved ministers and very senior military officers from participating countries, for two weeks.

The European Command sent a two-star officer who participated in the entire program. He was one of the program's participants. But also, as things evolved, it ended up that Wesley Clark, the commander, would go out and be that final day speaker. He agreed to this quite reluctantly, as I would later find he had little or no interest in Africa. In the normal course of events, the deputy commander would have done that particular duty because the deputy commander had primary responsibility for Africa. But there was a

conflict, and the deputy commander simply could not be available. And so, he prevailed upon General Clark to agree to that. Well, this was done well in advance and as it transpired, the bombing campaign against the Serbs had started by the time the actual event was to take place, and General Clark tried manfully to extract himself from the Africa event. But the deputy prevailed upon him, insisting that it simply had to be done.

And so, General Clark agreed that he would go ahead with it on the condition that the new aircraft that he was scheduled to get would arrive earlier than scheduled so that he could fly non-stop from Mons, Belgium to Dakar, do the event and turn around and get back all in the same day. So, I went up to Mons, Belgium the night before we took off and went to Africa. I got on the plane and discovered that his staff, for whatever reason, had never seen or had disregarded the briefing material that I had sent up to the general with respect to a speech. So, I had to start all over again and discuss with him what I thought he might usefully say. He accepted fully what I had to offer. And so, I quickly wrote out the text for his speech as we were flying.

He was not happy to be going on that trip but he did his duty, gave an excellent speech that was greatly appreciated, and really capped off the event very positively. Before the speech, there was an obligatory call on the President of Senegal Abdou Diouf. As we were approaching Dakar he said, "What am I going to talk to the president about?". And I suggested that you might find it very interesting to ask him for his views on Gaddafi, because I knew something about his views on Gaddafi and I thought Clark would find them challenging to say the least. And anyway, we went to call on the president. We went through the obligatory "How are you? Welcome to Dakar" and all of that, and the president then started to hustle us all out of the room.

General Clark was trying to raise the subject of Gaddafi with him and Abdou Diouf who was a towering figure---he was about 6'6, 6'7, ---was just kind of ushering us towards the door. I think what happened were two things. I think, maybe the embassy had overemphasized the tight schedule that the general was on, and Abdou Diouf took that on board and tried to be of assistance in that regard. But it also didn't help that it was a Friday and Abdou Diouf was a very devout Muslim and wanted to get to Friday prayers which were coming up very soon. Anyway, we then went on to the event, the general delivered his speech and we hopped back on the plane and got back to Mons and the bombing campaign. So anyway, the facilities in Freetown---

Q: Or do you want to take a break at this point, because we have been going for about an hour and a half?

CHAVEAS: Well, I can go on till about two o'clock. If you are for it.

Q: Okay. Well then, let's talk about Freetown as this very difficult, unaccompanied assignment for you and your staff. How was morale? I mean, what were the physical circumstances? And then, let's go to the morale.

CHAVEAS: Yeah. Well, the embassy itself---well, first of all, all of the facilities were exactly as I remembered them with respect to their location, but they were all greatly deteriorated. And the ambassador's residence had been expanded a bit from when I was there before, but it wasn't a very good choice in the first place and wasn't improved too much by the expansion that had taken place. The apartment block that my wife and I had lived in in the '70s was still a facility that we rented, as was the residence. And that apartment block, which was right across a parking lot from the ambassador's residence, was in poor shape. Not something you couldn't inhabit but it was a little like camping out for all of the folks that lived there.

And in between the ambassador's residence and this apartment block, there was a huge generator. There was no city power to speak of. Nothing that was in any way dependable, so we had to generate our own power. And so, one of the beauties of living in this apartment block was that it stood up on a hill, at pretty high elevation above the city---one of the beauties up there was the view but on the other hand, you had this constant thumping of the generator going twenty-four hours a day, to say nothing of all the generators that were servicing various businesses and houses in the city down below you. And so, not the greatest of living conditions but the hardest part of living there was we were all unaccompanied. In a number of cases, the officers that were out there were single so that they weren't missing their spouses. But nonetheless, everybody was either there without a spouse or was otherwise without that support.

One of my frustrations through the whole two or three years that I was there was that I kept asking various administrative support people about that apartment building. I said, you know, "Should we continue to rent this thing? Is it really something that can be repaired to make it more serviceable or should we simply get out of the lease and find some alternative?". For reasons that escaped me, I never really got a straight answer on all of that. I believe that it is no longer in the embassy stable of housing but it remained one of our lodging places while I was there.

The embassy itself was a disaster from a couple of perspectives. Number one, again, we were in a rented building. All this time, we were in a rented building, with landlords who were doing very little to live up to their obligations. The building itself sat on a corner, probably the most prominent corner in the entire city. It was right in the center of the city, situated right beside a traffic circle. One of the principal arteries for traffic through the whole city and as such, any significant setback for security purposes was impossible. It just couldn't be done. There were other buildings cheek by jowl with it, and we had two streets which ran right beside it. So, it was a security nightmare in waiting.

But I walked into the Embassy building the first day and I had told the TDY [temporary duty] admin officer there at that time, and the DCM, that one of the first things I wanted to do was to go from the cellar up to the rooftop and see the whole building. Starting down in the basement, we had a couple of huge generators. Once again, we had to provide our own power. The place looked like there could have been a major fire at any moment. There was oil and fuel running all over the floor, there were inadequately connected exhaust pipes and so on. The admin folks who were there, again TDY

personnel, had recognized that they had a real problem and they were working on cleanup to it. But it was a real worry.

Then we went up the various floors of the building, greeting particularly our FSNs [foreign service nationals] who had done extraordinary duty over those years. And going into their offices, every one looked like it had been trashed. I mean, the ceilings were hanging down, the drop ceilings. There were wires hanging down. It was just a mess and that continued all the way up to the roof. All of these problems, thank goodness, had been recognized before I actually arrived on the ground and there was work going forward to improve the internal situation of the building. The security of the outside of the building was another challenge but at least, we were beginning to make progress on the interior of the building and making it a useful space.

One of the features of the ambassador's office was that there was some rather chintzy wood paneling all around the office, and protruding from the paneling in two or three places were the tail fins of some rocket propelled grenades which had come through the windows of the embassy and lodged themselves in the walls and had been determined to be duds and not a danger. They were left there as decoration to remember the experience of the embassy. It so happened that during the period when the rebels had managed to occupy much of Freetown, they had not really been targeting the Americans. But they had been targeting the Nigerians who were situated in a building right next to ours, cheek by jowl with ours. The Nigerians, as I mentioned earlier, had been major players in the peacekeeping efforts, not always very skillfully. Anyway, the rebels didn't always have the best aim and we were the beneficiaries of that on several occasions. So, the building was generally a mess and we spent a lot of the subsequent year making it a more workable environment.

Q: How big was your staff?

CHAVEAS: Well, it was a skeleton crew. And when I first arrived, several of the folks were TDY. I already mentioned the admin officer who was there, as well as the GSO [general services officer]. When I initially arrived, we had permanently assigned, the DCM of course, a junior officer who filled essentially the same job that I had in 1970. And we had an office manager who was the spouse of the communicator. We had a very recently arrived defense attaché who had up until that point been the nonresident attaché based out of Guinea.

We had nobody, nobody with public diplomacy. We would later have a public diplomacy officer. And we had one AID contractor, not a direct hire. I think that was the entirety of the staff as I recall when I first arrived. Over time, we managed to restore more normal operations. We opened up our library after many years of that being closed and we had a public diplomacy officer. We eventually expanded the AID presence there. We had three people, all contractors, while I was there. But nonetheless, we had different AID folks and we had more permanent people of course, as admin and GSO. And if I remember correctly, by the time I left, we had twenty-four direct hire or contract personnel on the American staff.

Q: And did you have a Marine security guard?

CHAVEAS: No, none whatsoever. As you know, the primary role of Marines is not to protect American personnel, it is to protect buildings but most particularly, what is in the buildings. And we got around that by---except when a courier would come in and that was very infrequent---we never had anything classified above confidential in the building.

Q: It must have been an interesting tour for your RSO [regional security officer]?

CHAVEAS: Oh, I should have mentioned. Yeah, we did have a full time RSO while I was there. His name was Mike Bishop. One of the first issues that I tried to address was the fact that we were designated as an unaccompanied post. I had been having conversations with my predecessor Joe Melrose by phone for several months before I got out there. And of course, I had served in the country before, and I had also been observing events closely. I should say Joe himself was convinced that the situation had stabilized to the point where it was no longer necessary to be an unaccompanied post.

So, before I went to post, I had meetings with the assistant secretary in charge of Diplomatic Security, and also with the assistant secretary for Africa to talk about security and the unaccompanied status of the post. I was assured by both assistant secretaries that they would await my arrival at post and my opportunity to arrive at my own assessment of whether it was still necessary to have the post be unaccompanied. And that once I had communicated my assessment back to Washington that they would respect my views on whether that should continue. This one occasion when I learned, or relearned, I don't know which is the right answer, beware the one individual in the room who doesn't say anything.

I particularly recalled later on that the individual in Diplomatic Security who had specific responsibilities for Africa and who sat in on my meeting with the assistant secretary, never said a word. Well, I got out to post and one of the first things I did was to take an up country trip. I went up to one of the bases where one of the Nigerian units that EUCOM had trained was posted. I went up to the border with Guinea to visit with another unit of the peacekeeping forces. And then, I went up to the central Sierra Leone town of Makeni, which is where the rebels were at that time based. I met with the rebel leadership up there. I did this, obviously, so I could make my own assessment of what was really going on at that time. But I made a point of taking my security officer along because I wanted him to see what the reality was on the ground. And Mike was a very reasonable individual. He was not the over-the-top-we-have-to-fear-everything type of individual which I had experienced with some other security officers.

He went with me, and I agreed to his request to take some armament with him. It was stashed under the driver's seat, and it never left that location. Mike was able to see for himself what was actually going on to the ground. Shortly after that visit, I made a recommendation back to Washington to say that it was time that we could, with

considerable confidence, bring adult dependents back to post. I hate that term, "dependents" ---family members back to post. By the time I made that recommendation, the assistant secretary for Diplomatic Security, who by the way is somebody that I had known socially for a few years before when he was with the Secret Service, David Carpenter, had moved on to another job.

Diplomatic Security decided to---I'll be very blunt about it, they exercised a cover your ass approach. They said no, no and no. And the African Bureau did not support me and as a result, the limitation on families going to post was not changed until after the elections that took place in May of 2002. One of the things that always galled me about this whole process was that there was never any prospect that we would have more than two individuals coming to post as a result of that change. The admin officer's spouse and my spouse. As it ended up because of a personal tragedy in my sister in law's family, my wife didn't come to post until the end of that year. It wasn't like we were putting any significant additional number of Americans in danger.

The silent individual in Diplomatic Security actually paid a visit to Sierra Leone, I want to say in February of 2002. Twice during that visit, he told me how surprised he was by how much better it was than he had expected. But he still went back to Washington and said, "We will continue to cover our asses". And anyway, the elections and all the run up to the elections were even more peaceful than I thought they would be. There was one incident during the entire period that might have posed any risk to Americans. We knew in advance that it was likely to take place and hence, we made sure that no Americans were anywhere near it. We did our due diligence out in Freetown and the Department ignored it.

Q: Well, why don't we break off here. Thank you, you were saying two o'clock is your---

CHAVEAS: Yeah, I do need to move on to something else. But, okay---

Q: Thank you. So, we'll get back to this because I've got a lot of Freetown questions still.

CHAVEAS: Sure.

Q: So, what's your schedule?

CHAVEAS: I am out of town all of next week.

Q: Today is the 20th of October. We are returning to our conversation with Peter. We halfway started in Freetown and talked about the embassy and its situation. You actually did a lot of traveling around the country, if I understand?

CHAVEAS: Yeah, consistent with my approach all through my career. I always felt it was very important to get out of the capital, see what was going on elsewhere in the

country---that staying in the capital, staying in your office, would give you a very skewed impression of what was going on in the country. Traveling up country in Sierra Leone at that time was quite a challenge. Basically, all the roads in the country had been obliterated and some of that was the result of neglect prior to the war. Successive governments simply had not invested in maintaining what had been a fairly decent road system when we first served there in the '70s. But anyway, you couldn't go much beyond the edge of Freetown on any kind of paved road. And even the dirt roads were non-existent. You couldn't drive on them unless you had a four-wheel drive vehicle.

And in its usual wisdom, the State Department provided me with a fully armored large van, which was inappropriate even for Freetown because the traffic in Freetown, on very narrow streets, made maneuvering to and from work a real challenge. And if anybody thought that was providing me with some kind of security, they were wrong. Because sitting in that traffic for an extended period of time, if somebody was going after me, I would have been a sitting duck even in an armored vehicle. Fortunately, that was not an issue. But it did mean that traveling up country was a challenge, but our travel upcountry most of the time that I was there, was aided by the fact that we had two helicopters. With economic support funds, we chartered two Soviet helicopters, but they were chartered through a company in, I believe, Oregon. And the crews were both Russians and South Africans. Some interesting characters there but it gave us a reliable way of getting up to various places without dedicating hours and hours and hours to beating our brains out on non-existent roads with inappropriate vehicles.

That wasn't the primary purpose for which we obtained these helicopters. We knew that there were going to be elections soon after the war ended formally in January of 2002. And the helicopters were first and foremost for the purpose of supporting those elections. We transported ballots around. We transported poll workers around the country on election day itself, we transported teams from our mission as well as from other missions up country so that we had eyes on the process that was going forward during those elections, which we were putting a fair amount of money into. We also used them to support the British military. The British had made a major investment in rebuilding a credible Sierra Leonean army. The army had just collapsed as a disciplined force during the war, and they were every bit as much participants in the atrocities that took place as the RUF [Revolutionary United Front] was.

And so, the British put a very substantial team of military headed by a brigadier general, long term into the country to rebuild the military. We participated in that. We provided three officers to assist that team. There was a logistician, a highly trained medic who was the medical support for the entire military team. And one other individual, I don't remember what his focus was. But anyway, two lieutenant colonels and one master chief. The Canadians also had contributed a contingent, and there were a few others that participated in that British led effort. Over time, they had some very significant success. Within a couple of years after I left, Sierra Leone was actively participating in UN [United Nations] peacekeeping missions elsewhere in Africa, which was an amazing turnaround from being the host country to what was at that time the largest UN peacekeeping force in the world.

Q: Now, with this transportation capability, did you take some Sierra Leone officials with you from time to time?

CHAVEAS: Well, yes, and there was one particular event that I would point to. Obviously, one of the people that I interacted frequently with was President Kabbah [Ahmad Tejan Kabbah]. Kabbah was not much of a leader. He very much led from behind. He, along with many others, including our ambassador at that time, had evacuated to Guinea when things really got bad in Freetown, and the RUF took over half of the town. But our ambassador, Joe Melrose, would come back periodically and spend time in the capital, amongst other things, to make sure that our national staff was taken care of. They were keeping skeletal operations going in the absence of Americans. But Kabbah did not come back. And even after most of the senior diplomats---the British High Commissioner, Joe Melrose, our ambassador---a few others--- because there wasn't a big contingent by then---had returned to Freetown, they had to nag Kabbah, telling him that it was time to come home. That it was safe, and that the country needed his leadership.

He ultimately did come back. However, once back in the capital, he hardly ever moved out of his presidential quarters which were up on one of the hills which surround Freetown. The presidential office is right in the center of town, within walking distance of the embassy at that time. But if I recall correctly, he went there once the entire time that I was in the country. I and others were urging him to get out and about more, to convey a message to the people of his country that there was a functioning government and that there was a peace that could be sustained. And he was very hesitant to do that. So ultimately, and I am afraid I don't remember the exact timing but I would guess it was about eighteen months into my tenure, we arranged an event for him out in the eastern part of the country. The eastern part of the country had been more highly impacted than any other area because that is where the diamonds were, and it was also the focus of our assistance programs. And so, we were helping to rebuild schools, helping to rebuild health facilities.

We were working with diamond companies and diamond miners to try and arrange a situation in which there was better understanding by the miners of what the true value of their work was so that they could bargain more effectively with the companies and with the government for decent prices for their work. Anyway, as a means of enticing Kabbah out of the capital, we arranged a big event to launch a couple aspects of this program. These things had been going on already, they were established, but this was an opportunity for him to come out, pay attention to them, learn about them while he was at it, and show his face outside of the capital. And so, we organized the event in conjunction with local officials and the United Nations presence. We flew him out on one of our helicopters. That obviously enhanced his sense of security but also it made it a lot easier for him to get there. It also put the idea in his head that he ought to have his own helicopter. Fortunately, that never transpired. Anyway, we got him out. It was a good thing, but it was indicative of his lack of leadership, that he had to be enticed to do it rather than seeing the value of it upfront.

Q: How big were these helicopters? How many people could they hold?

CHAVEAS: Oh, I don't really remember. I want to say something on the order of twenty, twenty-five people. They were substantial helicopters. The military designation was an Mi-8.

Q: Now, Freetown and Sierra Leone have just gone through this war situation. As you said, the roads have torn up. Probably, the government is quite in its early stages and that would suggest, there was probably a bit of corruption certainly in how things worked. How did you see that, and how did you approach the issue of corruption?

CHAVEAS: Well, I talked about it an awful lot, which the president didn't necessarily understand or didn't appreciate. But I talked about it to him. I talked about it publicly. I talked about it to other members of his government and so on. And our aid programs, which were almost all financed through economic support funds, or through things like Food for Peace. There was a very substantial amount of food that the United States was providing. We did all of that working with non-governmental organizations [NGOs]. None of it went through the government. Now, by the time I left, we were giving serious consideration to how we should steer that in a different direction. Because obviously, dealing with NGOs that you have some degree of confidence in---many of whom, most of whom were not Sierra Leonean---that prevents them from fiddling with the money, but it doesn't build government institutions. And over the long run, the institutions of Sierra Leone's government had to be rebuilt and we hadn't done anything in that regard by the time I left, other than starting to think about how we might do it.

We had one AID [United States Agency for International Aid] contract employee the entire time I was there, Julie Koenen-Grant. In addition, we also had a contractor who ran disaster response activities. We eventually had a regional Food for Peace program director. She covered, I believe, Sierra Leone, Liberia and possibly Guinea. So, we ultimately had three AID personnel in the country, all contractors. In the closing months of my tenure, I got agreement from AID Washington in the person of the administrator for Africa, Connie Newman [Constance Newman], and her deputy who told me that when the one contractor left, which was scheduled the same time as I was leaving, they would both replace that contractor and add a direct hire employee who would be the supervisor of all AID activities in Sierra Leone.

We wanted that for a variety of reasons. One of them being that, up until that point, the AID director in Guinea had been responsible for our activities. And that individual had proven to be very ineffective. That was a real problem. And so, I convinced the AID leadership that they should give us a significant degree of independence going forward. The timing could not have been worse. I did have this agreement and AID did go ahead and replaced the contract employee, but the assistant administrator for AID Africa, left her position along with her deputy the same time I left my position. As soon as she was out the door, her bureau reneged on the commitment of a direct hire employee. And so, that did not work out.

Q: Now, you were sitting there in the aftermath of the civil war, and you are talking about working with AID. What were Washington's instructions to you to cover this one?

CHAVEAS: We were out there to help Sierra Leone recover from the disaster it had been through over eleven years. And help them to the extent that we could conduct legitimate elections and move on from there, to reestablish a credible government. I should say that---you asked what my instructions from our government were. I got very few instructions from our government. I would periodically tell our government what I was going to do. I never got any significant pushback on that but it was pretty much me writing my own instructions. We did a variety of things to, I guess you would say, massage the Washington bureaucracy so that that would work. I think, most particularly of the period when the elections took place. There was nervousness back in Washington. I have already described how Diplomatic Security was refusing to let us have family members at post because they were very nervous about the elections. I regularly told them that I saw no reason to believe that there was going to be significant violence. But I also was very careful to make sure, personally but also through our security officer, about what measures we were taking to make sure that American personnel and American citizens were out of harm's way when these things were going on.

As it ended up, even I had underestimated how peaceful those elections would be. There was one incident that took place in Freetown in the week or so before the elections, during a big downtown rally by the ruling party. We knew that this was going to take place, we knew that there was some risk involved. So, we made sure all the American community was aware. It was going to take place right in the streets immediately around the embassy, so I and a communicator, and one other officer spent the entire afternoon locked in the embassy, observing from there what was going on. The only incident was that that demonstration broke down at one point and they stoned RUF's headquarters downtown and one individual was injured. That was it. That was the entirety of violence during that election.

Q: Now, that election was held when?

CHAVEAS: This was in May of 2002. As I indicated earlier, we were doing a lot of things with our helicopter, but also a lot of things through NDI [National Democratic Institute] and another NGO whose name escapes me at the moment, to build the capacity of the Sierra Leone Electoral Commission. And also, to offer training to politicians on how to appropriately campaign. And we divided ourselves up into teams and with the British and UN and others, sent teams all around the country to observe elections on the ground. I was out in Kono, which is in the middle of the diamond mining area. The elections took place there smoothly. I was there with our one AID contractor, and one of the amazing things that I witnessed during that period was the Pakistani element of the UN peacekeeping forces based out in that area. And they kept all their vehicles circulating in such a way, all through the town, all through the surrounding area, in such a way that you would have thought there were thousands of them.

Every time you turned around, there was a Pakistani military vehicle coming down the road. They didn't involve themselves in any direct way in the election. They were just making sure that everyone was aware that they were present. We watched votes being counted on the floor of burned-out buildings, and ultimately, when the results were declared and we had a chance to really sit down and analyze them carefully, we came to two particular conclusions. Kabbah had to win at least fifty five percent in order to win in the first-go round. Otherwise, there would have been a runoff. Our analysis indicated that he did in fact win not just fifty five, but I don't remember the exact number, but it was a comfortable vote in excess of fifty percent.

However, we also came to the conclusion that various of his people just couldn't stand the possibility of him not being overwhelmingly reelected. So, they padded that vote but he was legitimately reelected. The other question that we were left with was the RUF, the rebel group, did not win any seats at all in the parliament. We thought at the end of the day that there was some possibility that they might have been cheated out of one seat. But even that was not in any way conclusive. So, it was a pretty smoothly run election. It would not have been so without our support, the UN support, and the British and others. But it did come off and the government was reestablished.

Q: Now, you have mentioned all this security apparatus that was in place in preparation for the election and whatnot. Could you give me a stronger picture? You were talking about the UN and the British. Who all was there providing security for the country in the aftermath of the civil war?

CHAVEAS: The British, for a significant period of time, had not just the training team that I described earlier but they had a significant number of Gurkhas in the country. They were slowly withdrawn after the elections took place. The UN presence totaled almost 17,500 military, the largest UN peacekeeping force in the world at the time. There was a very significant element of Pakistanis. There were several units of Nigerians and Ghanaians, which I mentioned earlier on during my time at EUCOM, the United States played a significant role in training. There were some Nepalis, Bangladeshis and Zambians.

And there was a large contingent of Kenyans, and the commander of the force was a Kenyan, Lieutenant-General Daniel Opande. Some of these units for instance, the Nepalis, the analysis there was that they put on a good parade. But you wouldn't want to be standing behind them in any kind of violent situation. But that wasn't the point really. The last event of the war had taken place out in the east and was quickly---this was in December '01--- dealt with by the Pakistanis without any loss of life. The importance of all of these units was that they provided a presence all over the country, which told the general populace and also anyone who might have been tempted to try and upset the peace process that there was a military capability nearby that they could expect to respond if necessary. And by and large, these units didn't just sit in their encampments. They moved around a lot. I have described what the Pakistanis did. That was the best example of how that would take place. But more than anything else, the fact that there

was this large international military presence spread all over the country put an umbrella over the process. That was really valuable.

Q: And you were mentioning that you were restaffing your embassy? Could you give us a picture of what the international diplomatic community looked like?

CHAVEAS: Well, it was not very large. Over the years, over ten, eleven years of violence and horrible corruption and, you couldn't say too many bad things about Sierra Leone back in those days. A lot of missions had pulled out. The Brits, of course, stayed on. They had the largest bilateral presence. The European Commission was there. A very large, substantial UN presence. A whole variety of different UN agencies were involved in different ways, and the UN Resident Representative was largely regarded by all of us as kind of the overall coordinator of our efforts. We collaborated very closely, we met with great regularity. There were a couple of others that were less part of that activity. There was, I recall, a very small Lebanese embassy, mostly because the Lebanese were and always had been very involved in the diamond business in Sierra Leone. And, they continued to have a significant commercial presence in the country. The grocery stores were Lebanese, things like that. There were good Lebanese restaurants in town.

One other international activity that was quite prominent was the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which was a hybrid Sierra Leone-United Nations activity. The court was set up to try those who bore the greatest responsibility for what had taken place and the prosecutor for much of the time that I was there was an American, David Crane. They established a functioning court, international judges. They built a small prison for holding the individuals who would be tried. This was all right in the center of Freetown. They indicted at least two of the three most senior RUF individuals and a sitting minister of the government. Much later the court indicted Charles Taylor of Liberia. We played a role when the initial indictments came down. There was a police sweep. I could see the minister in question's office from my office window. And that one morning, a whole contingent of Sierra Leone police under the direction of their British chief---the head of the police during this period was a British police officer---they went into the minister's office and arrested him, and then we provided helicopter transport to take him to a remote location where there was a holding facility.

The trials were conducted there in Sierra Leone and several individuals were found guilty. Two individuals died while they were in custody, the most senior leader of the RUF died, as did the minister that I just mentioned. There was no reason to believe that they were mistreated in any way. And indeed, one of my comments on the whole process in the end was that the prison facility in which these folks were being held in Freetown awaiting trial, which had electricity, running water, etc., was provided better living quarters and access to better medical services than ninety eight percent of the people that they had mistreated, brutalized over eleven years. Eventually Charles Taylor was serving a life term in a British prison. Two members of the RUF are serving life sentences in The Hague.

I was a real advocate for this court when it was first being set up. Partly because it was my job to be an advocate, but also because I really did believe that it was a worthy effort. I came to be much more skeptical. By the time it had actually reached its verdicts, sentenced people, so on and so forth, it took so much time that to the average Sierra Leonean the individual sentences could not have been more irrelevant to their lives. And I am not at all convinced that those sentences really had anything to do with the fact that Sierra Leone has not returned to violence. So, I became much more skeptical of the value of these kinds of processes in post conflict situations.

I talked earlier about Kabbah and his leadership style. There was also an effort in Sierra Leone to establish a peace and reconciliation process, similar to the one that had taken place in South Africa, where individuals would come forward and acknowledge what they had done during the conflict, and in many cases, they were spared any major punishment. Kabbah very actively manipulated the process of selecting those who would sit on that commission. He had one objective and one objective only for that body, to make sure that he was not held responsible in any way shape or form for what happened.

I was there the day that he testified before the commission. His testimony was shameful. Members of the commission and of the staff, which included some internationals, tried very hard to push back. He would lash out at them and tell them “How dare you speak to me, the president of Sierra Leone, in such a manner”. When the report finally was put together however, the international members of the staff and members of the commission did, to some extent, prevail. And they did note a number of situations in which Kabbah’s leadership failed. He then proceeded to go about it in another way. He made sure that the report was not issued or printed in quantities that the public could have access to, until quite some time later and it was done outside the country. By the time anybody in Sierra Leone had any access to that report, it was pretty irrelevant to their lives. So, in that sense Kabbah succeeded.

Q: On July 2, 2003, you made a statement about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

CHAVEAS: I did, yes.

Q: What prompted you to do that and what was your intent?

CHAVEAS I wanted to lend my support and that of the US Government to the process, to press for all of the participants to be as honest as possible. I never said anything specific about Kabbah but instead I lauded the courage and honesty of many average Sierra Leoneans who came forward to recount their experiences. It would not have been difficult for some people to read between the lines, I know that.

Q: As you were reconstructing the embassy staffing, did you arrive with the same DCM [deputy chief of mission] that Joe Melrose had?

CHAVEAS: Yes, but that individual ran into some health problems and ended up being medically evacuated and did not return. That was probably February or March of 2002. So, until a new DCM, Larry André, arrived at post that summer, the political officer, Tamir Waser, functioned as the DCM.

Q: So, how big was your political section by then?

CHAVEAS: One person.

Q: Nice, manageable African embassy. One of the historical connections with Freetown is the story of slavery and what is it, Bunce Island?

CHAVEAS: Bunce Island, yes.

Q: Bunce Island. Did any of that come forward during your time or---

CHAVEAS: Yes, yes. I was aware of Bunce Island from my first time there. I had visited it a couple of times. The fortress that the British and slave traders had built there was in very poor condition but it was not hard to see what it had been like. There was an American, Joe Opalo, who was particularly interested in the history of that fortress and everything that surrounded it. He became very involved in trying to promote it as a tourist destination. As you may know, there are a number of slave forts along the West African coast---in Benin, in Ghana, in Senegal---where they have become quite successful destinations for descendants of slaves and tourists, and the effort here was to try and promote Bunce Island in a similar fashion.

I thought it was in principle an excellent idea but the government of Sierra Leone had no reasonable policy for promoting tourism. They made it difficult for any variety of outside investor so people who might want to come in and invest in some kind of tourism infrastructure, always ran into various problems with respect to corruption. And at the time that we were there, the airline links to the country were very limited, in no small part because the government of Sierra Leone wouldn't pay some bills. I remember receiving a delegation visiting from the States. A group that was very interested in promoting Bunce Island as a destination. They came to see me. We had a fairly lengthy meeting and then, they were going on to see the president, immediately after they saw me.

They wanted my support for this venture in some way. And I said, I am supportive of the intent, but it is not going to go anywhere until this government does the necessary to make tourism in this country viable. I said, I hope you will talk to the president along those lines, that he needs to begin to think about how they will encourage the kind of investment that is needed to have a vibrant tourism sector, something that they had had at one point, back in the late '70s and into the '80s, before everything fell apart. Sierra Leone was a significant tourism destination. It had some of the most beautiful beaches you can imagine. And uniquely, in West Africa, they were safe because the continental shelf around Freetown and along the Sierra Leone coast was very deep. So, you didn't have the vicious tides that made beaches in places like Monrovia quite dangerous.

Q: Now, this is a Republican administration at that time that you were ambassador, and one of the programs that began at that time was the African Growth and Opportunity Act [AGOA] of 2000. Was Sierra Leone capable of taking advantage of that sort of opportunity?

CHAVEAS: Yes and no. By and large, they were not producing anything at that time that could really benefit from it. But they had an extremely dynamic woman, her name was Miller, as their trade and commerce minister. She went to an international gathering where she met the US Trade Representative, Robert B. Zoellick. He was so bowled over that he went back to Washington and said, "We must include this country in the full benefits of the AGOA". Now, as I say, they didn't have much to offer at that time that could take advantage of it but at least, they were on the list. And it wasn't because of any particular advocacy by me, this woman was a powerhouse and she did the job.

Q: Let me divert your attention for a minute. Given the environment that you were working in, what did you do to celebrate July 4th?

CHAVEAS: Well, as is common in West Africa, particularly along the coast, we don't do the national day on the Fourth of July because it is in the middle of the rainy season. You are usually doing these things somewhere outside and they get rained out. We tend to do them around Presidents' Day instead. These kinds of things had not been done for several years and so, doing them again was a part of our effort to convey some sense of normalcy in Freetown. The president never came to these things but the vice president, who was a particularly good contact, did. Solomon Berewa, somebody whom I particularly appreciated because I could go to him with a specific problem and say, "Mr. Vice President, I need your help on this". And he would do one of two things. He would say, "No, I can't do anything about that". Or he would say, "Yes, I will do that", and it would get done. Which was not too common amongst high level officials in Sierra Leone. Anyway, he was the senior official who would normally come to those things. The embassy residence was not the greatest facility for large events but we used it as best we could, and as I say, used it as a way to give a sense of normality.

Something that we did towards the end of my tenure along these lines, for the first time in more than a decade, we had an American musical group come from the States. They were on a tour under public diplomacy around the continent and we had Corey Harris and his partner. They performed on the side lawn of the ambassador's residence. The vice president came and seemed to enjoy himself. But again our effort was to convey some sense of normalcy, some sense that the U.S. was back in town as fully as possible. Another thing that we did during that period was that we had the first the first naval ship visit to Freetown in over a decade. And we got Kabbah to come on board and tour the ship, and that of course, got a lot of publicity.

Q: Who would be your main contacts?

CHAVEAS: Well, as I mentioned, the vice president was a valued contact. I had contact with an awful lot of the various ministers or deputy ministers in the government for different purposes. A lot of contact with the prosecutor of the Special Court; with the leader of the opposition, Ernest Bai Koroma, who eventually became the president in the next election after I left. Through him I had occasions to meet with a number of other leaders of the opposition. Of course, I spent a fair amount of time with my diplomatic colleagues. Also, members of the UN military presence. There were almost no Americans in the country beyond the official presence by that time and some who worked for NGOs [non-government organizations].

An interesting aspect of Sierra Leone when I was there the first time in the early '70s was that there was an enormous presence of Catholic missionaries. Also Protestant, but the Catholic missionaries were particularly notable, more than anything else running schools all over the country. All of the priests and nuns in the southern part of the country were Irish and all of them in the north were Italian. By the time I returned, the Irish had disappeared. There was not an Irish priest or nun to be found. The Italians were back and all over the north again and we would travel up north periodically. My wife and I would go up to a town called Makeni, which is the largest in the north, and then we would go on further north up to Kabala. The largest group of Catholic priests was in Makeni and my wife would make a big platter of lasagna, and she was greeted like a national hero in Makeni. And then, we would go on with a smaller portion of lasagna and spend time with the two priests who were up in Kabala..

Q: You were saying earlier the embassy was downtown, not part of the new security rules. Wasn't there a plan to build a new embassy?

CHAVEAS: Well, we began making the case almost immediately that we had to do something about getting out of the location that we were in. If there had been any effort against the embassy, it would have been quite easy. There was no reasonable way to keep city traffic away from our building and so, we started making the case right away. We were told that we were on the list but that the list was very long. However, there was a new embassy nearing completion in Conakry. And my deputy by this time was Larry Andre. Larry got wind that Brigadier General Williams, who was the head of foreign buildings, was going to be coming out to Conakry for the dedication of that building. And we contacted his staff and said, you know, couldn't he spare a little time to come down to Freetown and see our situation.

Well, the immediate reaction was, no, he is on a very busy schedule, blah, blah, blah. Well, then Larry threw in the fact, "Well, we have a helicopter. We'll come pick him up. We can fly him down here. He can spend an hour or two and we'll get him right back up to Conakry". So, they agreed and we got him into the embassy. We did essentially the same tour that I had taken that first day that I arrived. Things were much improved by then in the interior, but they weren't great. And the exterior situation, there wasn't anything that could be done about that. And then, we took him up in the helicopter and flew around town and pointed out the location that the Sierra Leone government had indicated to us could be made available for a new embassy.

We came back to our embassy. We sat down for a brief meeting in one of our rooms around a big table with a number of members of staff. General Williams looked across the table at me and he said, "This is the worst I have ever seen. We will fix it". And I applauded that. I took it with a grain of salt. But lo and behold, in the final weeks of my tenure, we had a ceremony to break ground for the new embassy building. General Williams returned for that. President Kabbah was there. The three of us had our own shovels and we got started on building a new embassy building.

Q: Sounds like the helicopter won the day.

CHAVEAS: It certainly did, yeah.

Q: Now, sometimes, quite exterior events will impact on embassies around the world. In March 2003, the U.S. invaded Iraq. How did that event come to you? Certainly, you were probably talking to the Sierra Leone government.

CHAVEAS: The Sierra Leone government and indeed, Sierra Leoneans, almost never made any mention of that issue. They may well have not appreciated what we were doing. I must say that I personally came to not appreciate it pretty quickly. But that was not what was on their mind with respect to their own situation and with respect to the United States. They were concerned about the fact that we were the most important contributor financially to the UN peacekeeping forces that were in their country. They were concerned that we were conducting various assistance programs around the country. They were concerned that we were doing various things to express our confidence in their future by doing such things as building a new embassy building, by expanding our staff, by doing various other things that I have described to convey our sense that things were returning to some degree of normalcy.

Amongst those things was getting family members to post, finally. My wife joined me in December of 2002. That had been delayed further because of a personal tragedy in her family. But we had gotten past the security people finally and had a total of two family members. That was one of my particular beefs with security because I kept telling them, even if you approve the return of adult family members, there were only going to be two more people. But that had no impact. Anyway, eventually, I had my wife with me. She traveled with me quite a bit, another way of conveying that we thought things were looking more and more normal.

Q: About 2004, you were coming to the end of this tour, and in fact, approaching possible retirement. How did the transition then, from ambassadorship to retirement, unfold?

CHAVEAS: Well, first of all, I was approaching definite retirement. I had no intention of seeking another ambassadorial post. I was up against time in class so, unless I had a presidential appointment, I wasn't going to be staying on. And I never even asked about it. I was not interested in continuing at that point. My wife and I, as much as we enjoyed our lives in the Foreign Service, we were ready to return to the United States and perhaps

move around a little less. We didn't have any grandchildren yet but there was certainly that prospect in the near future. So, leaving the Foreign Service was not in any way a shock in that sense.

But it was eased very much by a phone call that I received about a year before I left Sierra Leone. During my time in European Command, I worked very closely and amicably with a Marine four-star, Carl Fulford, who was the deputy commander of EUCOM the last year that I was there. Carl had stayed on in the military for a year after I left EUCOM and then retired and had been appointed to be the director of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. So, he called me up. It was roughly a year before I retired and he said, "I have just taken on this new job, and I need a deputy. And my requirement for a deputy is that it be someone who has an ambassadorial title and has extensive experience in Africa. Can you make any recommendations?". And I said to him, "Well, I don't know anybody with those kinds of qualifications currently who is available, but if you want to wait a year---". And he said, "That is exactly what I was fishing for". So, a year later, I retired from the Foreign Service. I think I took about a month off and then became the deputy director of the Africa Center. And then when Carl retired roughly two years later, I succeeded him.

Q: Now, where is the DoD [Department of Defense] Africa Center?

CHAVEAS: It is co-located with the National Defense University at Fort McNair in Washington. It is not part of the National Defense University, but it is co-located and there is a lot of interchange. And in fact, when I first went to the Africa Center, NDU did much of our administrative support work, particularly our personnel work. I used to refer to the Africa Center as the best expenditure of U.S. taxpayer money that you have never heard of. I really fell in love with the programs that they conducted. Unfortunately, the Africa Center goes on and still is very involved but its budget since I left suffered quite a bit. The year that I left, in 2008, I defended a budget of sixteen or seventeen million dollars. That was the high point. They never reached that point again. And between cuts in budgets and also the limitations that were imposed by COVID, an awful lot of their programs were reduced or eliminated.

Q: What was their mission?

CHAVEAS: We did two things principally. We were, first and foremost, an educational institution but a rather unique one. We had a full-time academic staff and we had a lot of people who would come in on a contract basis for specific programs. We conducted programs that ranged anywhere from four weeks down to a day or two, in which we engaged with Africans either in military uniform or in positions in ministries of defense and security. The program emphasized collaboration. It was not a bunch of American staff standing up and delivering lectures. Our staff included a Zambian born Dean, other faculty from Sierra Leone, Angola, and Benin; military officers from France and Portugal; as well as Americans. We had a very varied group of people who were our speakers, who came from many African countries, from some of the European countries that are particularly engaged in Africa. And we emphasized two-way communication

during all of this. We also conducted things in a way in which we made it clear that anything that came out of those discussions would never ever be identified with an individual or an individual's country.

And so, we were able to create an academic environment in which people felt very comfortable with expressing themselves freely. If there was a central theme to our educational programs, it was that we sought to encourage discussion of defense and security in a broader sense. That if you are a military officer, particularly as you go up the ranks, you can't just think of security in terms of the next weapon system, the next way that you organize your troops for battle or things like that. You've got to think about how your piece of the pie, if you will, fits in with national education, national health. All of the other things that contribute to a stable environment in which militaries don't have to be actually used. I found it absolutely fascinating and we built an excellent reputation so that we can attract some really high quality people to our programs.

For me, the pinnacle was that I had been seeking to inject more and more consideration of the risks of climate change into our discussions. And through the efforts of our ambassador in Kenya, I was able to get Wangari Maathai, the Nobel Peace laureate, to be our keynote speaker at one of our major events. This took place in Addis Ababa, it was the four-week program that we conducted for the most senior people. And, again, respecting the thought that we never reveal who said what, I will mention that after she gave her presentation, one officer, a general officer, stood up in his very bemedaled uniform and he was---I won't name the country---but he was from a country that you would certainly not associate with conservation efforts. And he was literally jumping up and down saying, "We'll plant trees, we'll plant trees".

The other piece of our activity was maintaining the network. After somebody went through one of these programs, we made every effort to keep engaged with them, and to keep them engaged with each other. We started to encourage them to create community groups in their respective countries so that those individuals who had participated in one of our programs would have a venue for getting together on a regular basis. And we would send speakers out to talk to them. Whenever I would travel, I would make a point of meeting with the community group in whatever country I was visiting. We wanted to keep them networked, principally with each other although obviously with us as well. And this is not Africa relevant but a story that inspired me in all of this was a story I heard from the president of the National Defense University shortly after I joined the Center. He was an Air Force three star who loved to tell about a Ukrainian colonel who had attended the National War College for a year and returned to Ukraine. This would have been around 2004, '05.

He found himself in command of troops, protecting government buildings during the earliest stages of the Orange Revolution and he received orders that he was to shoot to kill if any effort was made to attack those government buildings. He was very uncomfortable with that order. And so, one night he called up his National War College professor and asked for advice. They talked for quite some time and ultimately, the professor recommended that he go back to his chain of command. The order he had

received was from a senior political figure, not from his chain of command. And when he did so, went back to his chain of command, that order was countermanded. And presumably, that resulted in a lot fewer people being killed during those events. We wanted to encourage Africans to be communicating with each other in the same fashion. If there was tension between, you know, just to pick countries out of the air---Tanzania and Kenya--we wanted to make sure that there were senior officers from both countries who had gotten to know each other, perhaps through one of our programs.

Q: Now, were you paying for transportation to bring people to the Center for these seminars and whatnot?

CHAVEAS: Yes.

Q: And you traveled as well?

CHAVEAS: Yeah, I traveled quite a bit and you know, my State Department background came to be very valuable because I always was working with the embassies in the countries involved. And also, when I was in Washington, I very regularly attended the weekly African Bureau staff meeting. So, everybody involved was aware of our programs. I think, particularly overseas, the work with our embassies made them more aware of the value of our programs and therefore, because they were involved in identifying the participants in our programs, it made for better candidates to participate.

Q: Well, it seems like a very valuable project because weren't you saying in Sierra Leone, you had a number of troops under UN Command to support security?

CHAVEAS: Yeah. I have mentioned a couple of times during our Sierra Leone time, when we were engaged with the military, the British, the UN and the Sierra Leoneans. I would be very remiss if I didn't mention Bill Godbout [William Godbout], lieutenant colonel Bill Godbout who was our defense attaché, who had extraordinary rapport with his Sierra Leonean counterparts to say nothing of the other nationalities. While we didn't have a lot of resources to put into military assistance programs, boy did he make the best use of what we had.

Q: Excellent. You've had, just to summarize a fascinating career here from Peace Corps to ambassador, from diplomat to DOD advisor. Would you recommend the Foreign Service if you were lecturing at a university?

CHAVEAS: Well, I have had occasion to do that, and I've also had occasion to talk to individuals since I have retired. several of them here in [Brevard], about the Foreign Service. I try to be as honest as possible but I always, I think, ultimately come out saying it is a really interesting, valuable career. But I almost always say to them, before you go into the Foreign Service, if that is what you are going to do, get some kind of experience like the Peace Corps. Have that under your belt before you get into the bureaucracy. I found the Peace Corps experience just invaluable as I went through the Foreign Service because I think as a Foreign Service Officer, no matter the level at which you are serving,

you have to recognize that you are a member of the elite in the country that you are working in. And that you are associating primarily with the elites in those countries. That's just the nature of who's making decisions and who you have time to rub up against.

I thought that having the perspective of having lived in an African village for two years, and my wife did the same in a different country in Senegal, it just gave us a perspective on what the reality was of the country that we were in, that we would not have had if we simply showed up one day and walked into an embassy office and got behind the desk. It is not to say that some people don't succeed in overcoming those barriers without that kind of experience, but it is out there. It is an opportunity and why not grab it? Peace Corps isn't the only thing you can do. There are other possibilities but that's the one, obviously, that I know best, and which I stayed close to the whole time that we were overseas. Whenever there were Peace Corps volunteers in the countries where we served, we were quite close to them. Invaluable, really invaluable.

Q: One question I forgot to ask earlier. As you were rebuilding the embassy and its mission, what kinds of USIS or public diplomacy programs did you have at that time?

CHAVEAS: Well, initially, we had virtually nothing. We didn't have a public diplomacy officer and our library was in shambles. And we had some security concerns because if you got into the library, you pretty much got into the building. And so, initially, we did very little. But over time, we corrected those things. We got a public diplomacy officer, a very good officer. We had some excellent, excellent national employees who had been doing that kind of work for a long time. And probably the most valuable thing that we did was we reopened the library. We got it put back in decent shape. We figured out some ways of moving people in and out of it in a secure manner. We conducted some programs there, usually drawing on our own staff to talk about something. Or, in another case, my wife, who is a quilter and quilt historian, talked about quilts and how they relate to American history. Anyway, we built that and then I mentioned earlier that before I left, we managed to get a performing group in for the first time in many years.

Q: Well, excellent. Why don't we break it off right here. Thank you very much, sir.

CHAVEAS: Okay.

End of interview