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DONALD CLARK

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INTERVIEW

Q: Good afternoon. This is John Pielemeier on August 29, 2023, starting the first interview with Don Clark, who is an extremely experienced USAID officer and mission director. I think he's been mission director in more places either full-term or acting than anyone I've ever met. And I had the opportunity to meet him when he was a young officer way back.

So, Don, let's get started here. We want to start by asking you where you grew up and how you got interested in international work.

CLARK: I was born in Winchester, Massachusetts in 1947, moved to Carlisle, Massachusetts about thirty miles northwest of Boston when I was four and grew up there through college and went off to Peace Corps.

Q: Where did you go to college?

CLARK: I went to Colby College in Maine, Waterview, Maine.

Q: Did you row? Were you a rower?

CLARK: Nope, I wasn't. I played soccer. I was on the ski team.

Q: Oh.

CLARK: I—when I came back from Peace Corps I became a resident of New Hampshire, which would have been 1971, so—

Q: Let's go back a minute.

BECOMING INTERESTED IN INTERNATIONAL WORK AND PEACE CORPS

Q: I want to walk a little more slowly here if we can. Anything going on at Bates that led you into the Peace Corps?

CLARK: I went to Colby, not Bates – one of our rivals. Actually, I got interested in Peace Corps when I was in high school. But your question about interest in life outside the United States actually began much earlier than that. When I was, let's see, when I was

nine or ten my father used to be a salesman for a textile company based in Alabama. He was the sales rep in northern New England and actually had a couple customers in Canada. And one time when he had a business conference down in, I don't know if it was Alabama, it may have been in Florida. When he went to book his ticket, he found there was a special for families and so, my two brothers and I, we got a phone call saying, "Pack your bags, we're going to Florida tonight."

And we went to Florida. For us it was a vacation. This would have been in January of 1957, I think. And in those days, the planes had two seats, two seats and so, one of my brothers sat next to my mom, one sat next to my dad and I plunked down next to a guy from India. And the reason I sat down next to him was he looked different and I was interested in different, and I talked his ear off all the way down. In those days the planes used to go, you know, kind of Boston to New York to Philadelphia to Washington to wherever, to Florida. And I wrote letters to this fellow, who was a college student, and I was interested in collecting stamps and coins he would send from India. He also told me he made a file that he called "My First American Friend." He had just arrived in the States and so my letters went into this file.

So, I've long since lost touch with him but that kind of piqued my interest. I grew up in a town that was all white. I went to high school that was all white. By that I mean no students of color. I don't think there were—I don't think there were any—I'm trying to think if there were even Hispanic students. This was in Concord, Massachusetts, Concord Carlisle High School. And Colby also, Colby in those days had, out of a student body of, oh about fifteen, sixteen hundred students there were maybe twenty-five students of color. That was the world in those days. In fact, when I joined AID my IDI (International Development Intern) class, there was one woman and two black guys and twenty white guys. That was kind of the world, that was the world that I grew up in.

And I think my interest in what's different has always sort of piqued my interest in learning more about the world, about differences. And probably the most fundamental conclusion I came to through my time in Peace Corps and the United States Agency for International Development was that people around the world are more alike than they are different. People want a better world for their children. Unfortunately, there are all kinds of human dynamics that cause that not to happen. But anyway, that's sort of what piqued my interest.

And so, in high school I was at a picnic and there was a young lady who had just come back from Peace Corps in the Philippines.

And I listened to her story and was just enthralled. I mean, it sounded like such a wonderful adventure. And so, I was, oh, probably a junior in high school at the time, so all the way through my time in college I planned to go into Peace Corps when I graduated.

So, this was also a time with the Vietnam War and in those days, you got a deferment if you went into Peace Corps and of the people in my group, again, a very white group,

there were fifty of us at training, one married couple and forty-eight single white guys. That was the Peace Corps group I was in. And it boiled down probably to, oh, thirty or so who actually went overseas to—in those days it was called Upper Volta, now called Burkina Faso. But there were a number of people that were in Peace Corps or had signed up for it clearly to avoid being sent to Vietnam.
I wasn't going to go to Vietnam and be a soldier, but that wasn't my prime reason for joining Peace Corps. I joined Peace Corps because that was, as I said, sounded like a cool adventure and in fact it was and shaped the rest of my life.

Q: Any professors there that helped you think more about doing international work?

CLARK: There was a professor of economics, Jan Hogendorn, who I remember a course he offered in development economics that was probably my favorite course at Colby. But I was actually a French major starting out because I wanted to spend my junior year abroad and I wanted to go to Switzerland. And in those days very few students went abroad. Out of a class of 400 there were maybe, oh, twenty of us that spent our junior year abroad. I'm pleased to say that Colby, now it's like three-quarters of the students spend at least a semester somewhere other than Colby, many overseas, sometimes other universities in the States. Colby's also a lot more diverse than it was then.

So, I was a French major and probably would have graduated a French major except for after I spent my junior year in Switzerland, skiing a lot and studying a little, my senior year, to graduate I had to either take two courses each semester in—something in French or something in economics, so I kind of prepared my jump to economics and I graduated with a degree in economics.

Q: Did you apply for Peace Corps while you were still at Colby?

CLARK: Yep, yep. And in fact, the course that I took with Hogendorn initially I was keen to go. I was confident that I would be accepted. I think in those days Peace Corps accepted just about anybody.

I remember my first choice was to go to Chile because I wanted to be a volunteer but I also thought it would be cool to ski. (laughter) My second choice was Nepal. I just thought mountains were kind of cool even though there's not much skiing there. And my third choice, I didn't really have a third choice so I put anywhere for my third choice. So, I figured they drew a line between Kathmandu and Santiago and the midpoint was Upper Volta, so that's where I ended up going.

But when I first got in touch with Peace Corps to find out where I was going, they said it looked like somewhere in Africa and it looked like Ethiopia. So, I thought, Oh, cool. Well, so I read up about Ethiopia. They said, "Call us back in a month." So, I called back in a month and they said, "No, it's not going to be Ethiopia. Looks like Liberia." So, I said, "Cool, I'll read up about Liberia." So, I started reading about Liberia. And then they said—when I got my formal invitation—it was for Niger.

Q: Oh, my gosh.

CLARK: So, I wrote a paper on Niger. And about two weeks before training started, I had a phone call from some lady in Washington and she said, “Do you mind switching to Upper Volta?” And I said I didn’t mind at all. So, that’s where I went.

Q: (Laughs) What were you going to be doing as a volunteer?

CLARK: I was trained in gardening and animal husbandry. We pierced the nose and castrated bulls and learned how to train them to pull a plow. Kind of general rural development type stuff. When I got to my village, I did do some of that, but the thing that people most wanted was wells. And we did have a well-digging program. There were volunteers who were well diggers. So, I said, “Okay, let me learn how to do wells.” So, I got on my Mobylette (a small motor scooter) and rode up to spend a week with a fellow volunteer in the north of Burkina, or Upper Volta, and learned how to do wells. These were hand-dug, meter and a half diameter wells and you dig down to water and then pour meter high concrete rings up to the surface.

So, I ended up doing more wells than anything else. And it was kind of, you know, there’s the dilemma about do you give stuff to people or do you get them to contribute one way or another. And in my case, I had no funding. I did a school-to-school construction of a school and then later a maternity clinic, also on the school-to-school program, which was, in those days, an exception. But my Peace Corps director at the time, Reg Petty, said, “Well, let’s send it in, see if they fund it.” And in each case, I had leftover cement and, in some cases, villagers had to pass the hat to collect money to pay for the concrete, but then I had the mold and the know-how, so I probably did, oh, I don’t know, fifteen or so wells. And over the years I have gone back many times because of my time with AID and assignments in that part of Africa but also since I retired and I’ve done short-term assignments. I was last there in 2017, six years ago, and I was happy to discover that some of my wells are still functioning. (Laughs)

Q: Oh, wow. That’s amazing. That’s amazing.

So, what language were you speaking while working there?

CLARK: Gourmanché.

Q: I don’t know that language. How far does that reach across Burkina?

CLARK: It’s the eastern part of and it spills a little bit over into Niger, but it’s basically, it’s the eastern—it was one of the larger sort of geographic areas and the least populated, a lot of animal husbandry but also wildlife reserves, that sort of thing.

Q: Oh. So, did you learn French to go there?

CLARK: Well, I already spoke pretty good French. I mean, as you know, you don't really learn a language until you have to use it. I mean, there's school learning and you can read, you know, the poems and the novels and whatnot, but it was in Peace Corps that I really learned French. But there were only about five people in my village who spoke French and so our Peace Corps training in my case was in the Virgin Islands, Saint Croix, and so I had sort of the basics of Gourmanché. But the thing about living in a village is unless you only want to speak to those five people you either learn the language or you don't get to talk a lot and I like to talk a lot. In fact, my best teachers were kids. It felt less silly pointing at a tree and mispronouncing the word. And over time, I mean, over time I got quite fluent in the local language.

Q: Oh. Neat. Well, it sounds like a very good experience.

As you were coming to the end of your two years what were your thoughts about the future?

GRADUATE SCHOOL AT DARTMOUTH

CLARK: Well, when growing up I didn't know exactly what I was going to become or what I wanted to be. My father was a businessman and I thought, well, I guess maybe I'll be a businessman like Dad. So, I applied to business schools, to Dartmouth and to Boston University when I was still at Colby because I figured it was going to be difficult to get transcripts and recommendations and whatnot, you know, from a little village in Africa. So, I applied and got accepted at both BU and Dartmouth and then I wrote to them, I said, "I'm going into Peace Corps for two years. I'm still interested in attending your program but in two years rather than in the fall." And in the case of BU, they said, "Well, you'll have to just restart the whole application process." But Dartmouth said that they would honor my acceptance as long as I committed by the spring of the year I was going to attend.

So, I was kind of locked in at the end of my Peace Corps service, unlike many of my fellow volunteers. It may have been a multi-year group, a lot of people ended Peace Corps and weren't sure what they wanted to do. So, I made the decision. I went to the MBA program, Masters of Business Administration at the Amos Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, but I didn't really fit. I can remember there was a T group, the sensitivity training group with fellow students and a faculty sort of supervisor and I think there were seven of us, seven or eight of us, and there was one time when each person sat in the middle and would turn and face the people in a circle around them—and this was back in touchy-feely seventies—and each person would tell you their impression of you.

Q: Oh, really?

CLARK: And every one of the people in my group said, "I don't know what you're doing here." (Both laugh) And I mean, I did fine. And frankly, it was useful training. I think of an MBA program as more of a degree in problem solving. You could load up on finance

courses and become an accountant or something or in marketing and become somebody in sales. But Dartmouth's program was kind of like the parallel to a liberal arts education. So, there was a little bit of business law, a little bit of operations management, a little bit of accounting, finance, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And so, it really was kind of an approach to identifying a problem, coming up with a strategy to tackle the problem, ranking various strategies, and picking one. And so, that approach very much fits, frankly, any job but it certainly fits USAID's jobs.

Q: *And when those fellow students around the circle said, "We don't know what you're doing here," did they suggest what they thought you should be doing?*

CLARK: No. Well, they knew I was a Peace Corps volunteer and my hair was probably a little longer than most. So, I mean, at Dartmouth, an elite business school, you get people whose aspirations were to be the chairman of the board of IBM or Wall Street this or Wall Street that and that really wasn't what I was interested in. In fact, at one point I was asked if I was interested in extending for a third year in Peace Corps and I spent much of my grad school time sort of lamenting that I hadn't done that, that I missed being in Africa. And then, when I interviewed for a job near my graduation I was looking for companies that had international operations. But often, they would be okay, after three to five years in Cincinnati you might get a posting overseas and that was not very appealing. And in those days Peace Corps used to have—I don't know if they still do or not— but they used to have a newsletter with potentially interesting job opportunities for former volunteers.

Q: The Green Sheet.

JOINING USAID AND FIRST ASSIGNMENT IN UPPER VOLTA

CLARK: Yes. And so, that one time was USAID, which frankly, I'd never even heard of USAID, I didn't know what it was. But I kind of looked into it and so I applied to be an intern at AID and that's what I ended up doing.

Q: An international development intern?

CLARK: Yep. Yep.

Q: So, that was pretty much right after grad school?

CLARK: Yeah. In those days there was—I don't know if there was a hiring freeze or if they were slow to get security clearances but I graduated in May or June, and didn't actually start until October, which worked out well because I ended up building a home with one of my brothers and my father.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

CLARK: My father, he was the skilled one, my brother and I were the—we liked to think of ourselves as semi-skilled labor. My dad might have questioned how skilled we were.

Q: So, were you building that for your family?

CLARK: It was a retirement home for my parents.

Q: Oh, wow. That's really unusual, that's incredible.

So, at this point—you told us earlier that the Peace Corps kept changing your destination. When you joined USAID did they tell you where you were going?

CLARK: There were four of us for the Africa bureau, John Hicks, Wayne King, Gary Nelson and me. We were, as I said, twenty, twenty-two, twenty-three or so IDIs, interns, and there were four of us that were slotted for the Africa bureau. I assume that I was ticketed for the Africa bureau because I spoke French and had some Africa experience.

Q: Right.

CLARK: And so, my first post was identified as the regional office in Abidjan for West Africa.

Q: Mm-hm. Right.

And so, you did some, what, a couple of months of training in Washington before you left?

CLARK: I did. In fact, I think you were in my first office.

Q: I think so too.

CLARK: I think Sheldon Cole maybe, who was the—

Q: Yep, yep, the Africa Office of Project Development.

CLARK: Bob Bell was in there.

Q: Yep.

CLARK: Oh, gosh, I've forgotten so many names. But actually, I learned a very important lesson in that office, my first office, and that was dealing with people, particularly with support people. When I joined the office—in those days we had secretaries because people didn't know how to type. We didn't have computers, we had typewriters. And there were three secretaries and probably, I don't know, eight or nine small offices off of the entrance that were for individual officers but there was no space for me. So, at that time—actually, it's interesting. I remember the names of the secretaries, I don't remember names of all of the officers. But one of the secretaries was out sick, Bernie Bundy, Bernadette Bundy was out sick.

Q: Yes, I remember her.

CLARK: And so, I was parked at her desk with the other two secretaries. So, probably for the first month or so, before Bernie came back, and at that point they found a spot with a desk to park me. And I used to observe people coming into the office and some of them would be quite friendly to the secretaries and say hello, how was your weekend, da-da-da-da-da-da, and others would kind of come in grumpy and straight to their little office and they pretty much ignored the secretaries. Well, then I observed that when guys brought work out to the secretaries the grumpy ones were always the ones that had to have everything right away. The more simpatico ones would be, hey, get to this as soon as you can please. And with the grumpy ones I literally saw secretaries take the report, put it on top of their to-do pile, and as soon as the officer went back in his office put it on the bottom. (laughter) So, there's a lesson to be learned here. Treat people nicely and you're probably going to get more help that way. So, anyway, that was probably the most important lesson I think I learned in that first office.

Q: Yeah. That was the office of, I think, the project development for—

CLARK: Yep, yeah.

Q: —for Africa.

CLARK: Yeah. And I think the first project that I worked on there was—in those days AID still did loans and it was for the Parakou - Malanville Road in the northern part, in those days of Dahomey, Benin, now called Benin.

Q: Well, I think that was the end of an era but that's also during the Sahel program, right?

CLARK: The Sahel program started, in fact, before I even finished my IDI training and went to Abidjan. This was the drought of the early 1970s and I mean, the U.S. kind of noticed it a year or so later, just like most other donor countries. But there was a request to send a couple people to Upper Volta to design some sort of drought relief, famine relief programs. They said, "Oh, we've got a guy who was a Peace Corps volunteer there, he speaks the language, would you be interested in going?" And I said, "Sure!" And initially, it was for a month and it ended up being extended a second month and a third month. So, pretty soon after my joining AID, I think January, February, March, I joined in October, I was back in my Peace Corps country and very happy to be back.

Q: You were there on assignment?

CLARK: Well, it was a TDY (Temporary Duty).

Q: Still TDY.

CLARK: I was there with Don Atwell, who was ticketed to be the first country rep there.

Q: Ah ha.

CLARK: And actually, I ended up, because there was a snowstorm on the East Coast and he got delayed, I ended up arriving there I think just before a weekend, he came the following week. The embassy was very small in those days and we had official passports, the sort of maroon-colored ones, and it didn't occur to me to tell the embassy I was coming. I was, you know, a rookie in terms of protocols so I just showed up. (laughter) And as it turned out, the admin officer was meeting somebody—the embassy only had—they had a chargé and—who I think was the econ officer. They had an admin officer, they had a communicator. They had four or five people. And the admin officer was meeting a TDYer and saw me flash my passport and thought I had stolen a passport so he confronted me and I said, "No, no, no, I'm here with USAID." And actually, because I had a weekend to kill, I rented a Jeep and drove out to my village which was about 330 kilometers east of Ouaga. (Ouagadougou- the capital) my village was actually nearer Niamey than it was to Ouaga.

Q: So, you were there as the—in what office were you working?

CLARK: Well, in those days we were just designing start-up projects. There was a pot of money and there were similar efforts underway. I think in those days there was an AID office already in Niger, there was one in Senegal. I don't think there was one in Mauritania, Mali, Burkina or Chad. And so, in each of those countries there were—a few people were sent out to design sort of short-term development-type projects, drought recovery, drought mitigation kinds of activities. So, we designed a series of small activities there. And then—but I was there only on a TDY basis.

I was assigned to Abidjan, so at the end of that third month I went back and finished my Washington bit and then, let's see, in July I went out to Abidjan. But at that point they were talking about establishing offices in each of the Sahel countries and they were looking to staff them up. And I was—I thought that would be more interesting than working out of Abidjan and so, I put my name in over the objections of Shirley Marino, who was the IDI coordinator. She said, "You've got to expand your experience, not just go back to where you were a Peace Corps volunteer." And I said, "Well, but I like being there." And then, people weren't actually beating down the door to get assigned to Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, so I was selected. So, I ended up only spending about nine months in Abidjan and then I got formally transferred as—I think my title was capital development officer. It became project development officer but I think initially it may have been called capital development officer.

Q: Right. While you were going out to Burkina, I was sent to Chad for that first round.

CLARK: Uh-huh, yep.

Q: Designing programs there.

CLARK: Yep. I did get to Chad a couple times in the nine months I was in Abidjan.

Q: Good for you.

Well, so you went back to Burkina. You were basically still designing and managing programs for four years, is that right?

CLARK: Yep, yep. I was there for, let's see, I got there in the spring, I was there for about four and a half years. And during that time the office grew—I mean, when I first went out with Don Atwell there were just the two of us. It was probably, oh, twenty, maybe a little bit more than twenty U.S. direct hires by the time I left. In Ouagadougou.

Q: What kind of programs were you designing and managing?

CLARK: In those days integrated rural development was kind of the flavor of the development world, so that was probably the biggest one. But rural water supply, there was a girls' access to education project, there was a program to train forestry and wildlife management officers. I'm probably forgetting a couple others. There was something—Onchocerciasis, River Blindness was a big issue. There were some programs for development along the Volta rivers for the people affected by Oncho.

Q: Sounds very familiar. At this point you were still single?

CLARK: I was single. I met the love of my life in Ouagadougou. And got married in Ouagadougou. In those days when you got married to a local you had to get—you had to—I had to write a letter of—offer my resignation or—I had to be—the rules were you had to be counseled by a senior officer about the impact on your career and blah-blah-blah, and I was in love so I said, you know, "However this plays out, I'm getting married."

So, I got married and spent the first year of my married life in Ouagadougou and still—they didn't boot me out of the country after all. And our first, our son, my oldest son was born in Ouagadougou. When I was there, I don't think I was married yet, but I had a tee-shirt that somebody had sent that said—you remember the old tee-shirt that said, "Virginia Is For Lovers?"

Q: Yeah.

CLARK: Well, you could get a tee-shirt, you know, X Is For lovers. So, I got a tee-shirt that said "Ouaga is for Lovers." And I was wearing this tee-shirt when Lillian Carter, President Carter's mother, who was—also had been a volunteer, and she made a state visit to Ouagadougou and she was quite old at the time and they had a receiving line so that all of the Americans at post could—and volunteers could meet her. And I went through this line with my wife and one of her sisters and I was wearing this tee-shirt and she looked at me and she pointed at my tee-shirt and she said, "Young man, do you know

that for a fact?" And I said, "Yes, ma'am, I do." And she gave me a great grin. (Both laugh)

Q: Yeah, she'd been a volunteer in India, I believe, yes.

CLARK: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So, when you were thinking about leaving Burkina, were you in a bidding situation or how did the next assignment work?

CLARK: In those days we didn't have email, we didn't have online capacity. There would be bidding lists that would come out but the game was you would sort of express your interest and I thought, as much as I loved Africa, I wanted to see the world. And as I mentioned earlier, I think mountains are kind of cool so I was keen on going to Bolivia.

So, a fellow IDI of mine had been posted to Bolivia and he told me there was an opening coming and so I communicated with the Bolivia mission, expressed my interest, and they seemed, the LA (Latin America) bureau seemed keen on selecting me. And so, I put in my bid for Bolivia.

And then, about a month before the assignment board was to meet, I got a phone call from somebody in the Near East bureau trying to convince me to go to Tunisia. They wanted a project development officer type who spoke French and I met those criteria. And I talked to some colleagues at post who had served in Tunisia and it sounded quite interesting. But I told the person who called me, I said, "Well, if I end up getting assigned to Tunisia, you know, I would go, but that was not my preference." My preference was Bolivia and that I hoped that that's where I would get assigned, naïvely cooking my goose, so to speak.

And so, when the assignment board met, I learned about this later, the LA bureau, they said, "We want Don Clark to go to Bolivia," and the Near East rep said, "Oh, we talked to him about going to Tunisia and he said he's fine with going to Tunisia." Somewhat of a misrepresentation. So, the assignment cable came saying Don Clark, assigned to Tunisia. And so, I went and, you know, I talked to the senior people in the mission at that time and they said, "You know, you can protest this, but once the assignment board has met and deliberated, and you're a junior officer, you're probably not going to get the assignment overturned and you're going to get a reputation of being a difficult employee." So, I ended up not going to Bolivia, I ended up going to Tunisia.

Q:And that would have been about 1980?

USAID/TUNISIA

CLARK: Yep, '80, '81 I was there, two years in Tunisia. And I enjoyed Tunisia. Our second son was born there. For a while we were on a one kid per post rhythm. (Laughs)

Q: And what was your role, what was your position?

CLARK: I was a project development officer again. I was kind of misled. I was told, "You'll be replacing a fellow who is the head of his office and so, it will be a sort of step up, career-wise." Instead, they had already made plans to merge that office with the program office and I ended up working for the program officer, along with another fellow who was assistant program officer. And I wasn't really happy about that, but I enjoyed living in Tunisia and learning about the Arab world. And although Tunis was quite developed the hinterlands were quite underdeveloped and so, it was interesting work for the two years I was there.

Q: All right. What was the portfolio? What kinds of work were they doing there?

CLARK: (Laughs) It was really quite different from being in Africa. The government—and we still had loans—the government was, you know, it was almost like, okay, we'll do you a favor and we'll accept your program, you know. It wasn't like, oh gosh, please, help us, help us, help us, which was kind of the feeling you had—it did not feel like the projects were as vital.

I remember doing a rural water supply there, again, an integrated rural development. Central Tunisia was kind of our focus at the time. But it was sort of a—it was an interesting dynamic in the mission and probably why I didn't opt to stay there for two tours. The senior people, the office director level, were kind of old school, kind of coasting in their careers, no longer had that kind of fire in the belly to get out and make a difference. It was more of pushing the paper. And there was sort of a senior level and then there was a junior level and I think the juniors, we kind of thought of ourselves as the young bloods who knew more than the old guys. (Laughs)

Q So, you decided to move on and bid for your next post?

USAID/SRI LANKA

CLARK: I did. At that point, I can't remember at what point we got a better feel for where there were positions, but there was a lot of confusion in AID's system at the time. You maybe would bid on a position that you thought was open and it wasn't. I mean, we didn't make phone calls. You know, phone calls were ridiculously expensive. Didn't have email. You know, you wrote letters. And I was interested, as I said before, in kind of seeing the world and so, I applied to go to Indonesia and got assigned to Indonesia until there was a cable that said, "While we're impressed with Don Clark's skills, the position that he has been assigned to no longer exists. The person in it has extended for a second tour." So, I kind of went back into the hopper and ended up being assigned to Sri Lanka, which was also interesting, a different part of the world for me. So, I went to Sri Lanka instead.

Q: And that was 1982?

CLARK: Yep, ’82, ’83.

Q: Who was your mission director there?

CLARK: Oh, gosh. Sarah Jane Littlefield.

Q: Oh. I never met her.

CLARK: This is back in the era when the women who got elevated to mission director status could outdrink and out-curse the men. Lois Richards, Sarah Jane, I forget who all else. And Sarah Jane was—she was a force to reckon with (laughs). But that was also interesting although again, you know, I was a bit frustrated because yet again I was told I would be an office director and moving up and I wasn’t. So, it was in my next tour where I was recruited by Janet Ballantyne to go up to Nepal that things started to click then.

Q: So, were you traveling around? Did you travel in Sri Lanka?

CLARK: Yep, yep. I was there before the war. Actually, the war started while we were there. In fact, the incident that sparked the war, the war that went on for, well, there are still vestiges of that war, but went on for, gosh, twenty, thirty years, there was an incident at a cemetery about a mile away from our house.

Q: Oh.

CLARK: It was interesting because before that the talk in the country was that every now and then the Sinhalese and the Tamils go at it really hard and it just didn’t jive with the impression that I had of the people. And I played tennis with, you know, both and you know, you could tell sometimes by a person’s last name what their ethnicity was, but generally speaking, it was a very friendly atmosphere.

But with this event, all hell broke out. I mean, the majority Sinhalese would target the Tamils and there were stories of people tied up and doused in gasoline and set on fire. I mean, it was really, for about a week’s time, you were in a war. And during that week I had dengue fever, which might have been a good thing because otherwise I probably would have been standing out in front of my house with a baseball bat, defending my family and turf. Some Sinhalese did try to convince the watchman to siphon gas out of my car to make Molotov cocktails, but we had a German Shepherd at the time who was quite impressive and he helped discourage them from actually climbing over the fence. We had several neighbors who were Tamils who would harbor in our house during the day and then go back home to sleep at night because gangs were going around and looking for people to beat up or kill. That was a bit of a scary time.

Q: So, the fighting started in Colombo?

CLARK: Yep, yep.

Q: And these eventually became the Tamil Tigers?

CLARK: Yep, yep.

Q: What was the AID program like there?

CLARK: It was similar to your typical AID programs. There were health programs, environment programs, and agricultural programs. We had a wildlife program there as well. Most of it on the eastern side, a couple up north, but a lot of it on the eastern side of the island, whereas Colombo's on the western side.

Q: Were you involved with the Mahaweli Irrigation Program?

CLARK: Yep, yep, which was on the eastern side.

Q: Most USAID officers really enjoyed Sri Lana, well, when there wasn't fighting.

CLARK: Yep. Well, we were there for, let's see, we were there for probably a year before the fighting. So, we saw it at peace and it was wonderful. And even after the war, when the war began, during the incidents in Colombo, that sort of firestorm happened, especially for a week but then there was kind of a month or two of nervousness about reprisals or resumption, but things then kind of quieted down. It took a while for the Tamil Tigers to organize themselves to counterattack, so that second year was not constant conflict. It was actually a little bit kind of normal, a little bit normal. When I got assigned to Nepal, my fantasy was to drive my car up to Jaffna, to the northern part of Sri Lanka, take the ferry across to India and drive my car to Kathmandu and see India along the way. But that was no longer possible because of the war.

Q: How was the AID program affected by the fighting and was there an attempt to mediate the fighting in any way? Did you have a role in dealing with it?

CLARK: No. I think this was prior to AID getting into conflict resolution work per se. And as I said, while I was there it wasn't kind of an ongoing, open conflict. There had been the violence in the city and the tension, but then things were sort of quiet. And so, I think people who were paying attention probably could have predicted at least some of what was happening, but I don't know that anybody expected the war to go on as long as it did or to reach the stage that it did. I don't know if later, in the course of the conflict, what AID's role may have been in conflict resolution type work. Probably at some point during those years we did start to get into conflict resolution work. But that wasn't part of the AID portfolio in those days. Democracy governance type programming wasn't part of what we did—you know, it was agriculture, it was health, it was education. Those were the sectors along with wildlife or environment. Those were the sectors.

Q: Were the Foreign Service Nationals in the mission from both groups?

CLARK: Yep, yep, yep. And I don't recall there being issues, you know, in the office between people of different ethnic groups. If there was, I don't remember it.

The ambassador at the time was the former governor from the state of Maine, John Reed. He was an interesting ambassador. And as I said, Sarah Jane Littlefield was the mission director and she basically (laughs) bullied him just like she bullied the rest of us.

Q: So, again, you're on the fast track, moving in and out of countries.

CLARK: Yep.

USAID/NEPAL

Q: And you finally got to Nepal, where you wanted to go before, right?

CLARK: Yep, yep. Nepal was always on my I want to go list and I had the—not only was it a place I wanted to go but I had the good luck of being recruited by Janet Ballantyne, who was the deputy mission director at the time. And she had heard about me. She spent most of her career, I think, or much of it anyway, in Latin America and I think she had heard, somewhere along the way had heard about me and she was intrigued and asked me if I'd be interested in the job and I said, "Sure, sounds good." And so, she said, "Okay, do this." And again, I think many of my posts, most of my posts afterwards were four-year posts, two tours. But up until that point I was checking out the world. And the jobs were not as satisfying as, frankly, as it had been in Ouagadougou in Upper Volta, even as a bottom of the totem pole IDI. The job felt more important to me there and so the satisfaction from doing the job was greater.

Q: Did you ever think about leaving AID when you were in those difficult positions?

CLARK: No, no. Although when I did join AID I thought, okay, I'll do this for five years and then I'm going to do something different. But AID gave me the chance to see the world and do work that I felt was meaningful. And so, I managed to put up with some of the bureaucratic bullshit (laughs).

Q: Who was your mission director in Nepal?

CLARK: Dennis Brennan initially and then after that Dave Wilson, two very, very different mission directors. I learned a lot from both of them. Dennis was very proper, coat and tie kind of guy. Dave's a very loosey-goosey (laughs) go with the flow kind of guy.

Q: Did he ride motorcycles?

CLARK: I don't know if—certainly not Dennis. I don't remember Dave having a motorcycle.

Q: Okay.

CLARK: But I used to ride a motorcycle when I was in my first two posts, starting in Abidjan. In fact, when I got assigned to Ouagadougou I rode my motorcycle from Abidjan to Ouagadougou; took a day and a half. People said I would be crazy to do that and that spurred me on.

Q: Wow.

CLARK: Even after I got married and had our first kid, she used to—my wife is from Burkina and you know how African women would tie kids on their back. And so, she'd tie our baby on her back and get on the back of the motorcycle and that's how we got around. It wasn't until Tunisia where it gets cold in the winter that we bought a car.

Q: (Laughs) Wow.

So, Nepal, as I read your resumé you mentioned that there was—what's the proper term? The insurgency, the Maoist insurgency was at that point or was that later?

CLARK: That was later.

Q: Okay.

CLARK: Yeah, that was during my second tour in the early 2000s. Back in the eighties, '84-'88, when I was first there, there was no insurgency and you could go pretty much anywhere in Nepal. You just had to walk to get there and there weren't roads. Sometimes you could fly over the mountains into an area but it was absolutely fascinating topography. And when you got over the mountains you were cut off from the rest of the world until you came back and had no communications. And it was in some ways a bit like being in Peace Corps again. It was an adventure. And I've always been physical, like sports and exerting myself. Although (laughs) I remember Janet used to say, "I don't know why anybody likes trekking. It's walking uphill and sweating." But I loved the field trips and we would go out sometimes for two or three weeks at a time to get to project sites and so monitoring, visiting and learning about local conditions and needs and factor that into, you know, design of new programs and what have you. It was a lot of fun. Traveling in rural Nepal in those days was like going back in time.

Q: So, you were the head of the office for the first time?

CLARK: Yep, yep.

Q: How many people were you supervising?

CLARK: Oh, gosh. There were, let's see. I think there were four direct hires, we had probably ten or so Nepali staff, engineers. And we had participant training, we had all the construction—not only did we have the project design function for the mission, we

also—we had the engineers, we supervised all of the construction activities. So, I guess altogether maybe twenty people - something like that. And during the time I was there, the last year I was there, I guess the program officer rotated out, George Lewis, and the mission merged the project development office and the program office. So, I was the first head of that combined office.

Q: Did you have a management style? Did you know how to manage?

CLARK: Well, I don't know if I knew how to manage, but I (laughs), I did the best I could. I tried to manage people the way I wanted to be managed myself and basically, giving space for people to do their thing but to have the good sense to keep me informed and bounce ideas off of me before they made major decisions. But the way I liked to work was being given a task, you know, go out and design a rural water supply. Don't tell me what to put in it, just tell me, go out and figure out the best water supply project, what makes it. So, I tried to do that with the people that were on my staff.

And I'm a very informal person so I think it was—my management style, I think, was well received by most of the people on my staff. And there's some people who want to be directed. They want to be told turn left, turn right, go forward, two steps back, whatever, but I think most people in our line of work pride themselves on having, you know, good instincts and the ability to ask questions when you don't know something and run with it when you think you know it as well as anybody else, so. I mean, that style works best when, obviously, when you have talented people on your staff and for most of my career, I think I had pretty good luck. Not always, there are always a few people that aren't very good at doing their jobs.

Q: You recruited, I'm sure you recruited a lot of your staff—

CLARK: Yep. Over the course of my career I—and as I moved up, you know, and ultimately as mission director, I felt that was one of the most important things for a director to do, was to build the best team you could and part of that was recruiting, finding people who were interested in being the country you were in, finding people who were good at something that you had in your portfolio. And the same thing's true with selecting contractors to implement our programs. I always thought the key part was the long-term personnel who were going to be on the ground. Otherwise, they're all body shops and you know, they have their fancy logos and this and that and the other thing, but it's really, it's the people on the ground that are either going to make a project work well or not so well.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you ever take any management training?

CLARK: AID had courses now and then, but I think most, I mean, part of it was my business school. But yeah, it's not rocket science. (Both laugh) You know, you, especially if you have kind of a good back and forth with the people on your team, collectively you can generally come up with a sensible approach and so, that's what I always tried to do. And there are times when as a decision maker you make a decision which maybe is

something that some people are rooting for and some people are rooting for something else, but I think generally consensus was possible and so that's what we sought, what I sought anyway to involve the various teams that I worked with. Part of that also has to do with, you know, parking your ego at the door as opposed to, you know, people who want to advance by claiming credit even when it's not their due and deflecting blame when it is their due. I tried generally to avoid those people to the extent I could, but there are always some. Sometimes you can end-run them, sometimes you can't.

Q: Well, it sounds like you, if you learned on the job, you learned well. How about managing up? How about dealing with two different mission directors who were very different? Janet, who was a force of nature as well.

CLARK: Oh, yes, yes, very definitely. I think that I generally kept that approach of knowing when to bring something to the attention or doing it yourself. I mean, I tried to apply that in my dealing with people up as much as with people sideways and people down. And you know, I was pretty energetic and you know, so if there was project design to be done, I designed the project, you know. And there were some times you'd really get into it and you'd spend an all-nighter at the office getting stuff done. But back in the days when we'd have hundreds of pages of documentation, so I worked hard but I also always believed in a life-work balance, I would stay late at the office, I did not take work home very often. Home was for me and my family. And so, I think I was generally, I mean, I got good rating reviews and I kind of got promoted along the way, you know, kind of—

Q: Without trying (laughs).

CLARK: Well, no, I was trying, I was trying. I did, as my family got larger and I became more concerned about making enough money to send my kids eventually to school, I became more interested in moving up the ladder. I actually, early in my career, thought the best jobs were the jobs at the bottom because those are the ones that get to go out in the field the most. For me, that was the fun part of the job.

Q: Did you know the ambassador in Nepal?

CLARK: I'm trying to see, I'm trying to think now who was the ambassador. I didn't have very many dealings with the ambassador there. It wasn't until I—or with the embassy. I mean, I knew them if they ran on the hash or if they played softball but in a work sense it wasn't until I became a deputy mission director that I had to deal much with State people, ambassadors and what have you. I'm trying to think now who—I can remember who the ambassador was the second time around. But it'll come to me probably in the middle of the night, and I'll wake up and I'll say, "Damn you, John Pielemeier."

Q: Well, you can have your chance to edit your transcript.

You were there for four years. How many kids did you have by this point?

CLARK: Well, I had one when we were in Sri Lanka and we had one when we were in Nepal. So, in my first four posts we had one kid per post. So, the two, one born in Ouagadougou, one born in Tunis. When we were in Sri Lanka the RMO, the regional medical officer from Bangkok, he examined my wife and kind of, I don't know if this was deliberate or not, he said, "Oh, you might be looking at a C-section and we'd really rather do that in Bangkok than here in Colombo," because the medical facilities were much better in Bangkok. It turned out to be not true at all, but she went to Bangkok for her ninth month and liked it, you know, she was on medical per diem, she wasn't costing us money, and taking care of two little kids while you're pregnant was a lot—so Bangkok was a bit of a relief for her. And so, when we got pregnant again in Nepal she wanted to go down to Bangkok. So, our last two kids were actually born in Thailand during our tours. So, we had four young sons (the oldest was 6 when the last one was born); quite an active household.

Q: I bet. And they were all going to American schools?

CLARK: Yep. Well, actually, not the preschools. Our oldest son, when he was in Tunisia went to a daycare that was—where the language was Arabic and French. And our Tunisia nanny only spoke Arabic, no French. When we first got to Sri Lanka our son spoke almost as much French and Arabic as he did English. But at that point the kids in school spoke English and that's what he wanted to speak. So, even though we'd speak to him in French or Arabic he would respond in English. But I think—I forget now what that school—I think—it was an international school. In Nepal it was Rupee's International School up until kindergarten and then it would be the American School. But as you know, the posts overseas, I mean, they may be called the American School but they're essentially the international—

Q: Right.

CLARK: —some local kids but mostly the international community.

Q: Were you or your wife involved with the school boards at all?

CLARK: Nope. Never served on a school board.

Q: All right. So, you had been overseas, let's see, from 1973 to 1988. That's fifteen years.

DEPUTY MISSION DIRECTOR IN USAID/MALI

CLARK: Yep, yeah. And at that point I was told, "You've got to come back." (Both laugh) I didn't really want to go back to Washington, but I did go back. But I only spent one year and at that time Dennis Brennan had been assigned to be the mission director in Mali after spending most of his career in Asia. And he didn't exactly endear himself to the personnel in the Africa bureau in Washington and was viewed as a difficult mission director. And the deputy director at the time rotated out and I remember, in a meeting with the deputy AA (Assistant Administrator), Larry Saiers and they were saying, "Who

are we going to get to be willing to go out and work with Dennis Brennan?" And I said, "I'll work with Dennis. I know Dennis." (laughter) And I did. I mean, I wasn't bullshitting, I knew him and I said, "I can work with Dennis." And so, after one year in Washington I went—plus it was a step up—I went to Bamako as deputy mission director to Dennis.

Q; So, the family had come back and found a home for a year and then boom, you went back overseas.

CLARK: Yeah. The last year I was in Nepal my father died and I was home for that and in DC for a couple days. And so, at that point I knew I was coming back to DC and so I bought a house in Reston, Virginia, in one day. (Laughs) I asked a friend for a reference to a real estate agent and I said, "Show me as many houses as you can in this price range," and at the end of the day the one that I liked the most was—and the cheapest of the ones that she showed me was in Reston and so I put an offer down and bought a house. So, we went back to Reston for a year and then headed out to Mali, back to Africa. At that point I was keen to get back to Africa also.

Q: Were the kids?

CLARK: Yeah. I mean, sometimes kids, when you're moving around a lot it takes them a while to make friends and to get comfortable. But in our case, because we had four kids, basically when the youngest was born the oldest was six, so four rambunctious boys, they were their own play group. So, for them, wherever we went they had each other. And they've always been good at sports and so, that was another connection wherever they went in terms of meeting other kids. So, yeah I think that—they never complained about—well, at that age, when they were young they never complained about being overseas. But we learned, when we were in Bamako, one of our kids, our oldest kid, had a learning disability and we felt that we needed to go back to DC after one tour in order to give him as much attention as we could. As it turned out, it was a fairly mild learning disability. In fact, he went to Colby, my oldest son graduated from Colby, which is a good school.

And it was then after Mali that the kids, as I said, they were good in sports, they worked hard to catch up to kids who had played, for example, tee-ball, baseball from age, you know, six, seven, eight, they worked hard to catch up to kids their age in baseball, football, tae kwon do, soccer. And at that point, when the oldest was—actually, he spent his first year in high school in Reston and it came time to be making some decisions to go overseas. I thought, Well, I better look for a post back in Asia because those were the posts that had good high schools. There were very few, if any, in Africa, maybe South Africa. And at that point, they wanted to play football and baseball and as it turned out, hockey, and I couldn't think of a—maybe if we'd had a development program in Canada, I could have got him in. But we don't and didn't.

Q: Kazakhstan.

CLARK: So, then we went into—at that point the kids basically, they said, “We want to play these sports,” so we went back to the boarding school option State Department had, I assume still has, a very generous overseas educational allowance to send kids to school, so. I mean, I was a little bit sad. I would have liked to have stayed in Mali longer but it was the right decision to make for the family.

Q: What was the program like in Mali?

CLARK: Again, it was still that sort of standard AID mix of ag, health, environment, education. Things had started to change, though, around then. When I first joined AID I’d say probably, oh, two-thirds or so of the money, maybe even more, was in agriculture, economic development stuff. And over the course of my career, it switched to the health sector rather than the ag sector. In fact, there were times when economic growth and ag sector funds were very difficult to get and I think that reflected basically the—health became the more popular with both the Republicans and Democrats on the Hill and the budget and earmarks, and that’s the way the money went.

Q: Right, right. So, when you were in Mali there was no insurgency? You were able to travel everywhere?

CLARK: Yep, yep. Yeah, it’s a different world now, unfortunately. But yeah, in those days you could go anywhere. I mean, logistically it was difficult getting some places just because of the state of roads and what have you, but—and most of our program was in accessible areas, though, and sort of central Mali, southern Mali, western Mali. Not very much in the north.

Q: You’ve basically come back to a French speaking country so by this time you were more than fluent, I assume.

CLARK: Yeah, yep. I was. I am quite comfortable dealing in French. I’m sure I butcher it fairly regularly but—(laughs).

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Q: Right. This is John Pielemeier continuing the interview today, August 29, 2023, with Don Clark.

So, did you have any hint that things might sort of fall apart in Mali when you were there?

CLARK: No, no. No. You know, there were so many just sort of fundamental development issues, whether it was the transport infrastructure, communications, education levels, access to credit inputs, you know, all of the sort of meat and potatoes development stuff that we, you know, started dealing with. Those were the things that we worried about, inclusion of girls, that sort of stuff, democracy, governance, conflict, none of that was part of the issues. I think State Department might have done a little bit of

democracy stuff way back then but AID certainly didn't and conflict wasn't, it wasn't a variable in the development equation at that time. It became so probably, you know, I don't know, maybe in the last, I guess in the nineties, probably before the turn of the century it started becoming increasingly an issue, certainly was an issue in—first time that I kind of confronted it was, I guess in Uganda, when I was there '94-'98.

Q: Okay.

CLARK: It wasn't something that we paid a lot of attention to. It was, well, world events, access to weapons, you know, that changed the world we live in.

Q: I misspoke, I see there are several more tours overseas on your resumé here.

CLARK: Yep.

Q: As you said, you needed to go back to the States to deal in part with your son's education requirements and so, how did you work that out?

CLARK: Well, when I first went back to the States I figured that, you know, looking ahead that I would be looking for my next overseas tour in Asia because there were more posts that had good high schools for American kids, so Indonesia, India, Thailand all had programs and had good schools. And so, I figured I would look for a job in the Asia bureau to kind of chart my assignment, even though it meant I took a lesser job than I was offered if I went back into the Africa bureau. And at least in those days as long as you were competent and you did your job there were opportunities to move within a bureau.

So, initially I was the Philippines desk officer and that was a big desk. That was after Israel and Egypt, the largest recipient of U.S. development monies back—this would have been in '91, '91-'92, in there. And after a year as the desk officer, I moved up to be deputy director of that office in my second year. And then, in my third year at this point was when I was grappling—when the kids were talking about staying in the States and playing American sports I thought, Oh, well, if I'm going to do that and I need the overseas allowance and I wanted to go back to Africa anyway because that's where the job opportunities were best, I switched over the third year to be in the Africa bureau, an office director for West Africa. And from that got offered a mission director position in Uganda. So, those were the stepping stones, desk officer, deputy office director, office director, mission director was my path.

MISSION DIRECTOR IN USAID/UGANDA

Q: And you were able to work that out pretty much as you had hoped?

CLARK: Yeah, yeah, it worked out quite well. You know, I think I had a pretty good reputation and actually, the Africa bureau part, an IDI colleague of mine, John Hicks, was the head of the Africa bureau at the time, so that worked to my advantage. But I enjoyed

the couple of years in the Asia/Near East bureau because I got to do some pretty cool stuff. Philippines was interesting, working on the Philippines, but also that's when the Soviet Union came apart and I got to do some cool work in Ukraine and Kazakhstan as a result.

The U.S. wanted to do a display of friendship. Of course, we wanted to do it on the cheap so the U.S. military had surplus food and medical supplies from, I think the first Gulf War, and so the idea was to fly this stuff into the former Soviet republics and garner goodwill and show the people that America was there for them. And because it was military commodities, and they were going to be flying it in, the military was the lead on the operation but they added a Food for Peace officer and a development type to figure out okay, we get this stuff there, who do we give it to? So, we were a team of five, two young officers who were translators. This was the onsite inspection agency. I don't know if they still exist but it's an arm of the military that oversees the destruction of nuclear stockpiles. The Soviet Union and the U.S. reached an agreement to reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons but neither side trusted the other so they would send teams to observe the destruction and so they had Russian speakers. And I was the development type on a group that was supposed to go to Vorkuta in Siberia, 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle, in January.

Q: Oh, my.

CLARK: I thought this was going to be really, really cool. I got outfitted. There was a warehouse of military stuff out by Dulles Airport and I came home and put the stuff on. I had moon boots and so many layers I could barely bend my arms. I looked like the Michelin tire man. (laughter) But in the end they wimped out because they were concerned about getting an aircraft into Siberia in the winter and not being able to de-ice it and being stuck there until the summer. So, I got diverted, my team got diverted to Ukraine. So, we went to two places in Ukraine, eastern Ukraine, Kharkov or Kharkiv, which is currently one of the hotspots in the current conflict, and Lviv, in the western part of Ukraine.

And then later when AID decided to open up an office, a regional office in Kazakhstan for the five Stans, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, I went out—they had to train up people. AID didn't have Russian speakers or Kazakh speakers. And so, while they were training people they sent out TDYers to spend six, seven weeks at a time setting up the office. So, I went out there as the second one of these TDYers and you did everything- you were the mission director, the controller, the executive officer. I went out—you couldn't exchange money so I had a money belt of $8,000 to carry money out to the post office. You could exchange money once you were there but there was no banking, if you will. And in fact, the Soviets subsidized the arts so—and transportation—so Almaty, Kazakhstan, which I had in my mind something more like a Third World country, was European, maybe not Paris, but a European city with cathedrals and sidewalks and the arts. The most expensive entertainment was the circus. The best seats in the house cost ten cents. The ballet, the best seats, like I'm talking eight rows back in the middle, was five cents. And the opera was two and a half

cents. I flew on a plane—it was a regional office—I flew from Almaty to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, a couple hours' flight in a jet, for $2.50.

It's no longer that way but it was an interesting time. And it was the honeymoon period. And so, these people, when they learned you were American, more often than not they wanted to hug you, they wanted to get drunk with you. I got invited into people's homes. It was a great time to be there.

So, I had fun during my time in the Asia bureau and I routinely would look for TDYs that would get me overseas because life, not talking family life, but work, the work in Washington for me was never anywhere near as interesting as the work out in the field.

Q: So, if you were in the Office of East Asian Affairs, you could take those TDYs.

CLARK: Well, Linda Morris was my director at the time. She knew she had me—she knew I was ready to jump ship and she felt lucky she got me in the first place so she indulged me.

Q: All right. Is that your only involvement with the former Soviet Union in your career?

CLARK: Yep. Yep. Yeah, those two trips. It was sort of surreal, I must say, especially the first one when we went there with these military teams and had these MRSAT, you know, satellite dishes for communications and we're in Moscow and we're on balconies of hotels trying to set up these to capture a signal from a satellite and we're thinking, this isn't how I pictured this world. (Both laugh) Then going down, walking around, you know, what it is, St. Basil's Cathedral—the Kremlin and what have you.

Q: Wow. All right. Let's see. I'm not sure when you moved to the Office of West African Affairs. It's '93, it was.

CLARK: 1993-1994. I spent a year there.

Q: And were you dealing with any crisis at that point where there were difficult issues to deal with?

CLARK: I don't recall. There were a couple not so pleasant circumstances. I remember one time, I won't say his name because that's unkind, but I was in a staff meeting with our senior staff meeting in the bureau. And somebody said, "Well, we've got this guy back. He was on a medical leave of absence for a year. He had a reputation of being a total non-performer." And they kind of looked around and said, "We've got to take him. Whose turn is it to take this guy?" And since I was the newest office director they said, "It's Clark's turn. So, I got this employee who was—I'll give him credit, he showed up to work but that was about it. (Laughs)

I also remember it was a time when—for political Washington reasons—they were cutting back, closing posts..

So, I had to go out to Cameroon to help the mission figure out basically how to close its mission and wind down its programs. That was not the most fun trip.

But I don't remember—I'm trying to think. I think it was when I got my—after Washington I went out to Uganda, which had just gone through the genocide, the Rwanda genocide with bodies floating down the river into the lake and the Lord's Resistance Army in the north, where I recall—so this would have been '94. So, that's when conflict became not only an issue but a major issue in our work.

Q: So, you went to Uganda. This is your, I guess your first tour in East Africa, which is a very large mission, right?

CLARK: Yeah, it was a large mission, first mission directorship, so I was a rookie mission director. It was an interesting introduction to dealing with an embassy.

Q: Who were you following as mission director?

CLARK: Keith Sherper.

Q: Okay.

CLARK: Yeah. I won't say his name because if people really wanted to figure it out, they could figure it out, but the ambassador at the time was also a rookie ambassador. He had been DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) of several countries. And he and I were both due to go out at about the same time. And I got out there maybe a month before him. But we met in DC before either of us had gone out to post and in our first conversation, you know, I told him, "I'm a plain spoken person. I like to (laughs) speak what's on my mind rather than dance around things and risk being misunderstood."

And I told him I hoped we would have the kind of relationship where when he asked me what I thought about something I could answer honestly and not try to give him the answer I thought he wanted to hear. And he said, "Oh, by all means. By all means." Well, that didn't exactly turn out to be the case over my time with him. And so, we—yeah, part of it was maybe me being a prideful, rookie mission director, but I got myself kind of close to the edge of a cliff. (Laughs)

Q: How so?

CLARK: Well, because he'd been in Kenya where I think there was a high-profile ambassador. And people used to say he'd looked in the mirror and saw the high-profile ambassador and when he looked at Museveni and saw President Moi. And he decided that he was going to be the kind of ambassador that was going to challenge Museveni. And ironically, in many ways he was very accurate in his assessment although how we went about it was not particularly effective. He was convinced that Museveni was not nearly a saint at the time, again this is in the nineties, not today or even ten years or

twenty years ago, before Museveni kind of revealed a less attractive side. So, he predicted that Uganda would fail and Museveni would screw up and looked for data evidence to support that thesis.

Whereas I was working on the development side I was trying to help get girls into school, I was trying to help them approve ag productivity, I was, you know, whatever. And so, I was rooting for the country to succeed at a time when the ambassador, in my opinion somewhat perversely, was rooting for it to fail because that was his assessment, his analysis, and for him to be viewed as intelligent and accurate he wanted his prediction to come true.

So, from a philosophical standpoint we were kind of at opposite ends. He also, in his search for evidence to support his thesis that things were not going well, was not always very fair to those of us who were rooting for the country, the Peace Corps director or the AID people, and I found that people were kind of afraid to confront him. And I (laughs), you know, I would be less than as respectful as he would have liked. I like to think that I was semi-respectful, but anyway. We got to a point where he wrote a letter to his successor—I stayed there four years, he stayed there three years—he wrote a letter to his successor saying that I was unfit to be the mission director.

Q: Ooh.

CLARK: So, at a time when I was also coming up against my time in class in terms of promotion, luckily, there were people who came to my defense, senior people in Washington. Carol Peasley, basically saved my butt. In those days the ratings were written by the ambassador but there was an extra page written by the head of the bureau. And Carol basically, I think her piece countered (laughs) the ambassador's, who would have liked to have seen me out of there. But I think also on the State side, I think he was also viewed as a bit unfair in that regard, I guess.

It taught me to be more careful in dealing with State people, not just the ambassador, the econ officer, I guess more often the econ officer, the DCM, the ambassador than other people and not so much on the political side or the military side.

Q: More careful in how you presented things to them?

CLARK: Well, you know, I kind of naïvely assumed hey, we're all here to help this country succeed, and I found myself dealing with people who were—because the ambassador made it clear how he saw things, his staff were looking to give him what he wanted. And so, I kind of butted heads with a number of them, you know, trying to defend (laughs) the country, if you will and our activities in the country, and why getting girls into schools was important, et cetera, when at a time when they were, you know, looking for ammunition to say "Our AID programs aren't working." So, that was a bit challenging. But in my subsequent post that was less of an issue but I kind of went into them more with, you know, less naïveté, saying, "Take the temperature of the water before you speak," or jump in the water. I've mixed my metaphors here.

Q: You mentioned in your resume that you were involved with programs for victims of war torn northern Uganda.

CLARK: Yeah.

Q: That was our friend Kony?

CLARK: Yep, that was our friend Kony, Joseph Kony. Yeah, he had some truly bizarre beliefs and did some real brutal stuff in the north. So, we did have some programs in the north. It was dangerous to go there. We had some limited programs in the north and I did go to the north on a number of occasions. A number of very dedicated Ugandan people were trying to heal the country. Most of the country was, you know, more like your kind of standard AID program of health, education. I think our biggest program there was a girls' access to education project.

Q: You also mentioned involvement with HIV/AIDS. I believe Uganda was one of the major countries—

CLARK: Yep. They were the first of the heavily afflicted countries to kind of accept that they had a problem and talk openly about it. There were a number of countries that were basically in denial, embarrassed on the world stage of having AIDS so they hid it and they didn't deal with it aggressively. I mean, that's one of the things that Museveni did very well back in the nineties. And it was easy for people to relate because everybody knew somebody who had died of AIDS. My four years there, out of our staff of a little over a hundred mostly FSNs, maybe twenty expats and eighty FSNs, we had ten, ten people die of AIDS.

Q: Really? Oh.

CLARK: And the programs that we had, they were really powerful, powerful. You know, you had people who were HIV positive who would tell their story to try to educate people as to how they got it. There was the stigma, the issue of hey, even if somebody's HIV positive they're still your brother, treat them respectfully, this is how you get it, this is how you don't get it. But conversations with people who were HIV positive, these people were incredibly courageous. This is a time when there was very little in the way of treatment, they were going to die, they told their story and the conversation, you know, a bunch of people in an academic scenario could talk about HIV. When one person says, "I'm HIV positive," it's real, that person is across the table from you or under a tree in a village. I was very, very impressed by the courage of the people who would do these testimonials and talk about AIDS.

President Museveni was, I think, fairly open about it. His wife, on the other hand, was a bit on the conservative side in dealing with HIV-AIDS. In those days they talked about three approaches, abstinence, which is a joke, human beings are sexual, be faithful and if you must, use a condom. Mrs. Museveni was stuck on abstinence. And I remember at

a—I think it was when Hillary Clinton came out. She came out with her daughter as a pre-runner a year before President Clinton came to visit Uganda. And I was sitting next to a woman who was the head of TASO, the AIDS support organization, and Mrs. Museveni was making a speech about abstinence, abstinence, abstinence, abstinence and being faithful. She wasn't into condoms. And the head of TASO said to me, she said 90 percent of her female victims had only slept with their husband, basically saying, you know, it's fine to talk about this stuff, but it's not the real world. And as I said, every family had been touched by it. And so, they basically turned it around and the prevalence, I think that the prevalence of HIV positive was somewhere around a third of women tested positive for HIV when I arrived in Uganda. And I think by the time I left I think it was down to fifteen percent, and had been about halved. And that was in part because the disease was running its course but also because of these information campaigns to inform people about what it was, how you get it. And probably the biggest piece was condoms. So, yeah, that was a major part of our program.

Q: And those programs were working through the government or were they working through NGOs or both?

CLARK: Both, both, through the ministry of health, and there was something called TASO, The AIDS Support Organization, which was started by Noerine Kaleeba. Her husband had gotten AIDS and died of AIDS and she observed how he was viewed by his family, by his friends, basically shunned when it turned out that he was sick and that he was sick with AIDS. And wanted to do something about it and so she started this organization called TASO, The AIDS Support Organization, which again, tried to inform people about it and preached that your brother is still your brother, your sister is still your sister, and encouraged people to step forward, tell their story. So, there was another NGO, I think it was called AIC, AIDS Information Center maybe. They were the two biggest ones. But yeah, we funded and supported their activities.

Q: And USAID probably was the largest donor?

CLARK: Yeah, I believe so, yep. And it's funny. You look at the numbers now and it's sort of mind boggling. We used to talk about a million dollars or $10 million or $20 million as a big project. Now it's like hundreds of millions of dollars. That's inflation too.

Q: Well, then when it was hitting all of these African countries. You mentioned also some work with wildlife management or conservation?

CLARK: Yep. Uganda was fabulous for that. It's such a rich area for flora and fauna. I mean, I think one of the little factoids was just in Queen Elizabeth Park there was something like 434 species of birds. That's like, I don't know, two-thirds, three-quarters of the number of birds in the entire United States just in Queen Elizabeth Park. And we had programs with the national park services and with the conservation of mountain gorillas, a wildlife education center, rehabilitation of confiscated, poached animals, mostly chimps.

We had a woman who showed up from Kenya with a baby lion that at one point we were looking to release in the wild. In the end we decided it wasn't going to work. It was male, he probably would have been easy prey to the battle-tested wild lions. We got to play with these animals all the time. So, that was a lot of fun.

The one activity that made money, the one park that made more money than was spent on it was the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, which is where most of the Uganda mountain gorillas were. And they had two groups that were habituated to be comfortable with people coming up to—people weren't supposed to get closer than five meters and kids were not allowed because of communication of diseases. I think you had to be, I forget, twelve or fifteen and you couldn't stay for more than an hour. But basically, you'd have trackers and pay hundreds of dollars, probably well beyond a thousand now, to go trek in this forest, find the gorillas, watch them either sleep or play or eat for an hour. Well, one of the groups, one of the two groups, this dominant silverback male died of natural causes but the group splintered and it was no longer a group, and so all of a sudden, the park had lost half of its income stream. So, they habituated two other groups and one of the things that you do when you're habituating, basically you track them, you get closer and closer, get them comfortable, not seeing people as a threat.

But before they start selling tickets, they look for something called mock tourists, so I was a mock tourist. So, we went out and the new groups are in areas that are harder to find, the vegetation is thick. And again, the name of the forest is the Impenetrable Forest of very dense vegetation. So, climbing under bushes and over stuff and through swamps and we finally find the group that is being habituated and we're lying on our bellies, half in water, half on the edge of this swamp, and twenty-five feet or so away are a family of gorillas. And we had the TV moment where a male stood up on his legs, pounded his chest and dashed out at us, luckily stopped halfway, maybe ten feet away. They told us, they said, "If he comes too close, you're advised to act like a submissive gorilla, so don't look at him, bow your head, maybe pretend to eat a leaf. Do not run." Of course, all of us looked to see, can I run faster than the guy next to me? (Both laugh) Anyway, the gorilla, he did his mock charge to the mock tourists, anyway. So, I had a lot of fascinating encounters with wildlife.

We did another one where we were trying to repopulate a park in Kidepo, in the northeast, with giraffes. They were down to one aging female and five related males, giraffes, and to widen the gene pool we brought in from Kenya, from the same type of giraffe, five, I think one male and four female, teenage giraffes to re-populate the park. I never heard how that worked out. It was just starting when I left.

Q: Wow. Who was your environment officer?

CLARK: Oh, gosh. Dan Moore.

Q: Okay.

CLARK: We didn't have a direct hire. Dan later became a direct hire, became a mission director, as a matter of fact.

Q: Yes.

CLARK: And is just, I think, retiring this year.

He was a contractor. He had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon and was hired as a personal services contractor. And there was also on the implementation team another guy who became mission director and who gave you my email, Peter Trenchard.

Q: Oh, yes, Peter Trenchard.

CLARK: Yeah. When I was there, when I was in Uganda, he was on the implementation team for our environment program.

Q: I didn't know that he'd been in Uganda. I only knew him in Senegal.

CLARK: It's a small world that we are in.

Q: (Laughs) Right. Peter said he's just retiring now.

CLARK: Oh, is he also retiring? Yeah.

Q: You also mentioned finally in Uganda that you were there after the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Would you talk about that a little bit?

CLARK: Yeah. Apparently, the intel was that five posts had been identified as targets and Uganda was one of them, as was Kenya, Tanzania and Senegal, my next post.

Q: Really?

CLARK: So, I ran into this in two places. In Uganda, our office had about a ten foot setback from the road, a main road, and car bombs were the sort of delivery method at the time. We were highly vulnerable had there been an attack there. The embassy was part of the British high commission as a piece of the building, maybe a mile or so away from the AID office.

Q: Were they vulnerable also?

CLARK: They were but, you know, I guess that they wanted to target Americans and the only way they could have hit them would have been to hit the Brits. Maybe that played into why they didn't attack there or who knows what the reasoning was. But instead, they went to Dar and Kenya. Yeah, I think there were five posts. There was Senegal, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and I forget the fifth one. When I got to Dakar, we were in a building—the embassy had been—they'd closed off streets, you know, had a couple

blocks dedicated to protecting the embassy, but our office was on top of a gas station. (Laughs) They could have lit us up.

Q: Oh, wow.

CLARK: So, one of my first jobs when I got there was to find a new office, so that was kind of fun, actually. Our EXO and I went out to check out some places. We checked out the Club Med, as much as a joke as serious but ironically, in the end the embassy acquired a piece of the Club Med property and that's where the current embassy/AID office is.

CLARK: I'm glad they didn't bomb us. We would have been in trouble.

Q: Did you all provide any assistance to either the mission in Kenya or Tanzania after the bombing?

CLARK: No. No.

Q: No, that was a game changer for a lot of people.

CLARK: Yep. and actually, they rushed in these rules about setbacks and because they wanted to do it quickly it wasn't always well thought out. So, technically—this came into play when we were putting a satellite office in the Casamance in Senegal—one FSN, Foreign Service National employee and a driver. Even for a single person the law said you have to have a hundred-foot setback on all sides but there's nothing on your residence. So, if bad guys had wanted to target this one individual, they could have just taken him out at his house and wouldn't have to do it at the office. So, it hadn't been thought all the way through, on top of which, you know, what is the—what's the reward for taking out one local employee for people who presumably do this stuff to get big headlines. They wouldn't have gotten much of a headline.

CLARK: This stuff was sort of the beginning of security consideration, where in the country you could go, where you couldn't go, what kind of activities you could do, what kind of activities you couldn't do. And I saw that throughout my tours in, frankly, both Senegal and the second time when I went back to Nepal.

Q: Right.

MISSION DIRECTOR IN USAID/SENEGAL

Let's talk about your move to Senegal. You had a—you'd waited out the ambassador. I guess it turned out that the next ambassador wasn't so difficult and you had—

CLARK: My next ambassador in Uganda was Nancy Powell. And as I learned, she didn't hold her predecessor in especially high esteem, which also mitigated the Don Clark-not-suited-to-be-mission- director-in-Uganda letter.

Q: So, after four years, how did the transfer to Senegal work?

CLARK: At that point they were looking for people, you know, people were retiring, et cetera, and I found myself—even though it was my first mission directorship, I did two tours. I was of the crew in Africa that was kind of not super senior but sort of senior, and so there was some talk about assignments to different parts of Africa, but I was keen to get back to West Africa, francophone Africa. And so, I put in for Senegal and thankfully, was accepted to go to Senegal. Dane Smith was the ambassador then Harriet Elam-Thomas. But the last year I was there, my ambassador was a guy who had been a Peace Corps volunteer with me.

Q: Who was that?

CLARK: Richard Roth.

Q: We know Richard and we know Dane Smith, yeah.

CLARK: Very well.

Q: BWhen you left Uganda, who replaced you, can I ask, as mission director?

CLARK: Dawn Liberi.

Q: Just to have that on the record.

Q: Okay. So, you do a direct transfer or you did home leave?

CLARK: When I went to Senegal, let's see. I did a home leave and then went to Senegal. Got to Senegal in early '99 in time for the big West Africa softball tournament. (Laughs)

Q: I thought you were going to say in time for 9/11, but that's not the—

CLARK: And then, I was there for four and a half years.

Q: Oh. Well, what happened in the softball tournament? Were you playing? A ringer?

CLARK: That first year we did not win. It's called WAIST, the West Africa International Softball Tournament. I first went there from Ouagadougou the very first WAIST tournament in 1977 and our team from Ouagadougou won.

CLARK: We got to the tournament, we played slow pitch. I don't know if you're into softball; but we got to the tournament and found out it was a fast pitch tournament. And we didn't even have a fast pitch pitcher, but we had fast outfielders and no fences, so we pitched slow pitch, they would hit these long shots and our outfielders would run down and catch them. Half of our team struck out every time because they couldn't hit the fast

pitch, but half of us who had played high school baseball shortened our swings and scored enough runs to win.

Q: There you go.

CLARK: But that first year did not win but over my time there, let's see, I would have participated in five tournaments when I was posted to Senegal and we were champs twice. So, that's pretty good.

Q: Did your sons play?

CLARK: Yep, my oldest played in one of them. After he finished college he came out and spent, I guess about a half a year with us and that coincided with the tournament and so yeah, he's a good athlete. They all are.

Q: So, he was a ringer for your team then.

CLARK: He was a ringer for our team.

Q: Well, tell us more about Senegal. I know that by that point you were probably managing or involved with management of several of your neighboring countries' very small programs.

CLARK: Yeah. Because AID had gone through that period of cutting—shutting down missions, unlike back in the seventies when we were opening missions, we had no assigned personnel, no offices in many countries, including, in our case, Cape Verde, Mauritania, the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. So, we, the Senegal mission, were responsible for those programs.

This is also when they opened up the Sahel Development Office in Bamako and they didn't have any health person on their initial team and we had a senior health officer, Felix Awangtang, originally from Cameroon, in our mission, so we also managed the health portfolio of the regional program. So, that got us to go to places like Togo, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina and Niger. And of course, I took advantage of that to visit Burkina once a year when I was posted in Senegal. And I would get to the satellite countries, if you will, the Guinea-Bissaus and Cape Verdes, probably twice a year I would go. And we funded mostly small NGO programs in those four satellite countries. That was fun for me. I liked the variety and there were different circumstances in each country.

You know, one of the interesting things on the AIDS front was, you know, when I said before that in Uganda everybody knew AIDS because everybody had been touched by AIDS, when I was in Mauritania and trying to talk health, in our health program there one of the NGOs was dealing with HIV-AIDS awareness and found that it was less than 1 percent of the population and it was rare enough that many people did not believe it existed, thought it was just a fabrication by the West or the government, but it wasn't real to them because it hadn't impacted that many lives. And I mean, in general it was much

less prevalent in West Africa than it was in East Africa and Southern Africa. I have a couple exceptions. Côte d'Ivoire was probably, I think, of the countries we dealt with the one that had the highest incidence of AIDS. But even the highest was much less than in East Africa. And part of that was probably due to the fact that culturally male circumcision was the norm. Also, notwithstanding some legislation from various political parties, prostitution in Senegal was legal and prostitutes got health care because it was legal and so they were less likely to be transmitters of the disease than in countries where it was sort of under the table.

Q: And they were called sex workers rather than prostitutes?

CLARK: Yes, I guess so.

Q: Well, that's interesting. But still, HIV AIDS was probably the biggest—was that the biggest part of your portfolio?

CLARK: No, no, I don't think so. Let me think, in Senegal, where was the money? I would say certainly the biggest portfolio was health, but there were a lot of non-AIDS, programs whether it was family planning, nutrition, child survival, there was a lot more money in that than there probably was in AIDS, in part because AIDS was less of an issue in Senegal than it was in Uganda. Health was certainly the largest portfolio. We had a decentralization support program. What else did we have? We had a little bit of agriculture. Actually in Uganda, one of the things that we designed in order to do the conflict mitigation in the north, those programs in northern Uganda we, on top of our regular strategy we had a special objective to deal with that. And when I got to Senegal, there was a long-running feud, war really, in the Casamance. That sliver of Senegal on the other side of the Gambia, that sliver, had essentially a liberation movement and the state fighting against locals in that area. After about twenty years of fighting there was a lull and the government asked the donors to consider going into the Casamance and trying to deal with the situation. I saw this as a perfect opportunity to do a special objective and get some more money from Washington for programs in Senegal. And in fact, Mark Wentling, I don't know if you know Mark?

Q: Yes.

CLARK: Mark at that time was not in a long-term assignment. We hired him to help us design this special objective. And we were the only ones. The other donors basically said they were concerned that it was maybe not safe, including the French. But we jumped on it, said, "Okay, we'll go down there and we'll do what we can." And of course, with AID's marking requirements every little thing we did we had to have a sign that said, "From the American people, USAID, this, that and the other thing," used to drive my French colleagues absolutely bonkers when they finally did go down there to see AID tooting its horn. (Laughs) But we found an opportunity, we found some local organizations that had kind of a foot in both camps or access to the rebels. One of the sort of fun activities we had was sponsoring cultural weekends where basically a ceasefire, if you will, an agreement on the government that rebels could go back to their hometowns

and dialogue with the people in the village. And there would be wrestling matches and soccer matches and dances and an opportunity for the communities to identify activities that might result in the combatants putting down their guns and coming back home. So, that was kind of a fun activity that we did there.

Q: Was the program relatively successful from your point of view?

CLARK: Yes, although I'm sure there are still issues. You know, a big part of the issues in not just West Africa, in so much of the world these days is the access to weapons and the willingness of zealots whether they're true believers, religious zealots or, in my experience, my belief it's more banditry, criminal activity than it is religion behind a lot of this stuff. But you get people with guns that are willing to use those guns and to do bad things. They can terrorize the population and make development activities, make life, difficult. And I'm sure there's still some of that in the Casamance, but I think there's relatively less of that than there was—I mean, it's been a long time since I was there. I did do a couple TDYs where I was back in the regional office in Senegal after I retired, so maybe.

Q: So, you were there for four years. You worked with a lot of different ambassadors across the region.

CLARK: I did.

Q: Can you say anything about that after experiencing Uganda? (Laughs)

CLARK: I had good relations. Most of the ambassadors, especially in the satellite countries were very keen; they had such little stuff going on or money from Washington, so in Mauritania or the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, well, actually, Guinea-Bissau we didn't have an ambassador. The embassy was closed there during the war. There were just the NGOs and us and somebody from the embassy, the consular officer—no, was she the econ officer, I think. I think she may have funded a couple self-help things since she went down there with me once. But they were delighted to have our attention, with the exception of the ambassador the second half the time I was there in Cape Verde. This is when the Millennial Challenge Corporation was getting going and he was banking on getting bit bucks, not just piddly NGO bucks so he wasn't all that interested in our NGO activities. But generally speaking, the ambassadors were very receptive and welcoming.

Dane Smith was there for maybe the first six months or so I was there. Then there was Harriet Elam-Thomas, in many ways my favorite ambassador for 3 years. And finally, for the last year Rich Ross was there—he became Richard Ross at State. He was Rich when he was a volunteer.

Q: Right. (Laughs)

I remember reading somewhere when I was trying to find out how to contact you, I saw something on Google where somebody in his or her book said that they had traveled

around Senegal with you and determined that you were the best USAID mission director he'd ever met.

That you knew all of the ministers and they enjoyed talking with you and you knew the staff members and you had the best relationship that they had seen. So—

CLARK: Well, thank you for that.

Q: But Senegal's a tough post; there's a lot going on.

So, anything else from Dakar? You must have had a very good staff there.

CLARK: Yeah, very good staff. Working for AID was a good job for Senegalese. And Senegal had a labor law of a mandatory retirement age of perhaps as low as fifty-five. But we routinely did a waiver if employees were good employees and wanted to stay on longer. And so, we had a number of senior FSNs who were well beyond that retirement age. Because of that, we weren't hiring because there were no openings. And I felt it was important that we get new blood, that we get new, fresh thinking, new ideas. And so, basically, I informed the over retirement age and approaching retirement age FSNs that henceforth those waivers were unlikely to be granted.

But that allowed us to go out and recruit new talent and that was something that I felt was important. It frankly is something that I felt was important with AID as well. We would go through various hiring freezes and people all get old together. When I joined AID, we young whippersnappers were in our twenties, mid- to late-twenties, the sort of rank and file were in their thirties and the old guys were in their forties. Well, over the course of my career I got to a point, maybe when I was in Senegal, maybe sooner, where the average age of an AID Foreign Service officer was something like forty-eight. And so, we all kind of got old together and just the new ideas and energy levels of—there are some older people who are sharp and energetic, but there are also some that are kind of get into a coasting mode.

I think that an organization needs a regular inflow of new ideas, new thinking, new approaches. Development is difficult and I think it's important to get as many ideas as possible and that requires going outside the box from time to time. So, one of the things I did in Senegal was—I had to think long and hard before I did it, but I felt it was best for the office in the long run. I was upfront with staff, talking to them about this. I tried not to be sneaky or show favoritism.

And you know, tried to be fair about it.

Q: Did you have any pushback from the—was there an FSN association?

CLARK: We had a wiseman's council. Had that in a few different places. Had that in Mali, I think, as well. And we had that in Senegal and I talked to them about it. Also in—I think we had it in Uganda as well. I think many missions have that, basically FSNs

who've been—local employees who have been around a long time and can advise, especially young people if there is recruiting, you know, how to survive in an American environment overseas. We're not always the easiest to work with.

Q: Right.

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Q: All right. This is John Pielemeier on the nineteenth of September, we'll continue our interview with Don Clark, who's a multi-time mission director in Africa and other places.

CLARK: Let me just mention one thing, sort of a spillover from Uganda to Senegal was that I was in Uganda when the bombs went off in Nairobi and Dar in, what was that, that would have been '98, I guess. In Senegal the embassy was fairly well protected because they shut off streets so they had basically a whole block perimeter. But the AID office was in a separate building on the fourth and fifth floor of a building that sat on top of a gas station. So, we were a rocket waiting to be lit up if somebody wanted to. So, one of my first jobs in Senegal was to find a new place. But at the time, we found the Diorama Hotel, which was one of the first sort of high-rise hotels built in Dakar. And they had a wing that had been damaged by a fire but it had good setbacks and it was right on the ocean, a beautiful location. And because it was fire damaged it needed renovation. The owner didn't have a lot of money to renovate it so we converted that into, I would say the nicest AID office I worked in in my career.

I used to look out of my window at the Atlantic Ocean, including—there was a surfing movie made in the, when was it—sixties, seventies, called *The Endless Summer*, and they had footage from around the world, and the break that was surfed in Senegal was—I could see that from my window, so it was sometimes hard to concentrate. (Both laugh)

Q: Right. Were you happy to go back to francophone Africa?

CLARK: Very much so. You know, my career, one of the things I wanted to do was to take advantage of my career to see a good part of the world, but I found every time I left francophone West Africa I was homesick for francophone West Africa. So, my career kind of included going away, coming back, going away, coming back, so it was very nice to be back in francophone West Africa.

Q: And what were your major challenges there in Senegal as AID mission director?

CLARK: Well, I followed a mission director who had seen it as her mission to pretty much close down the AID program.

Q: Oh.

CLARK: I don't know this for a fact, I think she had become rather cynical about the impact of foreign aid and in fact they did a country strategy and she took it into

Washington and proposed cutting the program, focusing only on democracy governance programs, if I remember correctly. And in those days that was the smallest pot of money so it would have gone to just a couple million dollars a year program. Washington, I think particularly the health people, objected and so there was still a robust program in health. And there was a little bit in sort of traditional AID programs. So, I was surprised, in fact, when I got to Senegal.

One of the first things I liked to do when I got to a new country, whether it was as mission director or other, was to sort of see the country and get a feel for the conditions on the ground, I mean, maybe my Peace Corps upbringing. And so, I said to the staff, "Well, what ongoing projects are there? What can I go out and see?" And there was almost nothing to see because they had been in a wind-down mode for the previous couple years while they simultaneously developed their strategy. So I perceived my task, in addition to finding a safer building, was to build back the AID program. And that was kind of fun. And you know, if you have various technical officers who are passionate about their work, they're also clever about finding various pots of money in Washington to design programs that might take advantage of those funding opportunities and so, in fact, during the time I was there we did build up the program. I forget what the numbers were but—so that I saw kind of as my challenge.

Q: This is a very interesting topic and did you find ways of managing your ambassador or managing up?

CLARK: Well, it really wasn't really much of an issue for me. You know, when I was in Uganda, part of the issue there was the mission director who preceded me was very much—he ran the AID program and he kind of had a wall between him and the embassy on the AID program and maybe because he was senior and maybe it was the ambassador he was working with, whatever. Back in the day, I assume this is still the case, signing grant agreements with the host country government, the ambassador does not have the authority to commit funds, the AID director does. And so, whether or not an ambassador signs an agreement, that agreement, his or her signature is honorary, not funds-committing. And in Uganda the ambassador—that practice was he didn't even sign those agreements. He wasn't invited, as I understand it, was not even invited to sign them. And I figured that, well, hey, if this makes them feel like they're more a part of the process I had no problem sharing the signing ceremony with the ambassador and the photo op and you know, whatever was in the newspaper or on TV, I had no issue with sharing the spotlight with the ambassador. So, I tried to—much as I tried to encourage the office directors under my supervision, I tried to, you know, when to share information, whether it was successes or problems with the ambassador, just as I wanted office directors to share issues with me when they needed to. Not every little detail. I wanted them to run their programs but—and I think that as long as you make good judgments in that regard people are comfortable that they're in the know and if they think you know how to play softball, they let you play softball (laughs).

Q: Right. Right.

So, the program was built up while you were there. Four and a half years, that's quite a while. What was the focus of the growth?

CLARK: We had programs in decentralization, I remember we had a project. We had a forestry program. We had a few small agricultural programs. The biggest sector, probably more than half of the portfolio, was various health programs, HIV-AIDS, family planning, child survival, sort of the whole menu of health activities. We also—I mean, I think I may have touched on this earlier in the interview, we were also asked to go into the Casamance.

Q: What kinds of things did you do in that sort of post-conflict situation?

CLARK: One of the things we did was we sponsored what were called cultural weekends where there was an agreement between the rebels and the military, the Senegalese government, essentially an agreement that people, the fighters could go back without reprisal, could go back to the village for a limited period of time. And we also had funds so that the communities could identify a small project that was a priority for that particular village. In one village I think it was a mill to grind grain into flour, another village that was on an island, it was a boat to provide medical evacuations and supply to the village. I forget what the other examples were but these were relatively modest investments, but it was something to give the community a sense of ownership and address something they perceived as their need. In fact, in looking at the grievances that the rebels had, they resented being governed by northerners, a different group. They felt that they didn't get as much of the budget as they deserved and they didn't have as much say over how that budget was spent as they thought they should. I mean, pretty understandable grievances, frankly, and so this program was intended to address both of those issues in a modest way. So, I got to attend several of these cultural weekend events and they were very exciting, especially the singing and dancing parts.

Q: Good, good. Did you participate yourself?

CLARK: Nope. I took a lot of photos (both laugh).

Q: And you were welcomed?

CLARK: Yep, yep. Yep. It was a little of a challenge on occasion, getting the embassy regional security officer's permission to travel into areas that they had kind of identified as unsafe areas to go but essentially, we accepted the sort of guarantee of a hiatus in fighting for a specific area for a specific period of time. And thankfully, ambassadors were supportive and so I got to go to these places that I might otherwise not have been officially allowed to go to.

Q: Remind me, do you speak any Senegalese languages?

CLARK: No, no. A few words of Wolof but my African languages are Burkina Faso, Mooré, and Gourmanche.

Q: So, what language were they speaking in the Casamance?

CLARK: Well, Wolof is the language of the north. The Jola in the south, you know, they have their own language. Also in addition to ethnic differences there were religious differences. The European missionaries—that was an area that had the richest farmlands, the best forests in that part of what became Senegal and so the missionaries were there big time. So, there is quite a significant Christian population in the Casamance as opposed to most of Senegal is Muslim. So, there were ethnic, religious, geographic, several reasons for there to be some discord. I don't know to what extend the fact that it's sort of separated also by the Gambia, this little sliver country along the river that sort of separates—you can go around the Gambia to get to the western part of Casamance, but more typically you drove across the Gambia and took a ferry across the river to Ziguinchor.

Q: Over time, how did this reconciliation process pan out?

CLARK: Well, I'm not terribly current on Senegal. I mean, what I read now is more about sort of national politics. A candidate who is supported by much of the youth but the sort of incoming government trying to reduce his likelihood of being elected. I have not heard much about the Casamance and the conflict there so I'm hopeful that things have remained calm. During the time I was there things seemed to be headed in a positive direction. And a recent phone conversation with a retired Senegalese army officer (and friend) did tell me that things are currently quiet in the Casamance.

Q: That was like 1999 to 2003 or so?

CLARK: Yeah.

Q: So, twenty years ago.

CLARK: Yes, early 1999 to mid-2003, at which time I went back to Nepal.

Q: Anything else you'd like to mention about the Senegal program? Anything that you're particularly pleased about in terms of what was accomplished?

CLARK: No. I enjoyed my time there very much. As I said earlier, it was nice to get back to francophone West Africa. Of all the places that I served it's the place I probably felt the most at home, in part because that's where I, you know, I had my baptism, if you will, with Peace Corps. But when it came time to be bidding on posts the Africa bureau was—wanted me to stay in Africa because at this point I had served you know, for nine years as mission director so—and with people retiring I was all of sudden instead of a rookie mission director I was one of the senior mission directors. Some talk of going to South Africa, which is a very big and politically prominent program. But at that point I was getting to where I felt I would do one more post and then retire with aging parents and just family circumstances. And I was keen to go back to Nepal, which was opening at

the time, so I lucked out and got assigned to Nepal and went back and spent my last four years in Nepal, my previous stomping grounds.

Q: Well, you say you lucked out. I mean, that's probably not exactly what happened (both laugh).

CLARK: Well, you know, I mean, the assignment process is one that I learned over the course or my career how to play it better than I did early in my career. It's one of the things that you learn. Part of it is networking and having people in sort of influential positions in your corner, part of it is, you know, expressing—figuring out what your preferences were and expressing those, and maybe being flexible on timing so that you know, you moved when an opening where you wanted to go opened up. So, yeah, it was—

Q: Who were some of the people back in Washington who were your supporters?

CLARK: Well, in the Africa bureau Carol Peasley. For much of the time I was in Africa Carol was, she was the AA, acting AA, I think, at one point. John Hicks was also, who had been in my IDI class, he was the head of the Africa bureau when I first went to Uganda for that part. I forget who all else. I do remember Larry Saiers, when I first went out to Mali as the deputy mission director. In fact, as I was going out that was my first senior management position and I remember asking Larry just before I left if he had any words of wisdom, the last advice that he wanted to give me before I went out to post and he said, "Don't lose your sense of humor." (laughed) And when he first said it, I thought he was just sort of joking but you know, there's a lot to be said about that and I took that piece of advice to mind and tried to share that with others during the course of my career.

Q: One of the issues that one might come up against as a mission director in a francophone country when you speak the language very well, did you find it easy to make friends, Senegalese friends and what was your relationship to FSNs versus the direct hire staff?

CLARK: I've always been very interested in sports and one of the ways that I connected with Senegalese was playing softball. And when I first arrived there, there were a couple Senegalese guys, notably a fellow who was the physical education teacher at the international school who had picked up softball and was playing with the Americans. And one of them came to me, a guy by the name of Gauchey (Lefty), and he said he wanted to grow the sport in Senegal and he wanted to get more people, Senegalese, players involved and asked me if I would help him and I said, "Sure," in part because the people, the expat community that played softball only played it for about six months of the year and why they didn't play it all year I don't know. The weather's fine. And so, this would allow us an opportunity to play for the, you know, year-round.

And so, we identified a school that produced physical education teachers so we were dealing with young Senegalese who were athletic as opposed to just random kids off the street, and also both men and women. The strategy there was that you wanted women

there because the men would pay attention and want to excel to impress the women and the women would want to impress the men. So, with that, over the course of my time there I got to know a lot of young Senegalese and in addition to the fun, the athletic side of things, it also gave me sort of an avenue for input, what's going on in Senegal and in ways that a diplomat doesn't typically connect. Another—that same group and some others also involved in something called the Hash House Harriers. I don't know if you're familiar with the Hash but—

Q: You might explain it for your readers.

CLARK: Yes. It's something that started in the thirties in Kuala Lumpur and it was a bunch of British expats, I think mostly military, who used to convene at a, I guess a greasy spoon restaurant called the Hash House, and they would go on a run that was not a race but they'd lay a trail with little bits of paper so it's more of a game. You'd run for about a mile then there'd be a checkpoint and the trail would disappear and resume somewhere within a couple hundred meters. And so, the fast runners got to the checkpoint first. While they were finding where the trail resumed the slower runners caught up so the group kind of came more or less together. And then afterwards they'd drink beer and shoot the breeze. And this spread, initially in Southeast Asia but ultimately around the world and it's still today it's quite a popular thing. It was initially only men, later—now it's mostly men and women.

And that was another area I was active in the Hash in all three of my mission director posts. In Uganda there was a general who used to run with us. There were people in the expat community, people—heads of NGOs, and I found these circumstances to be great opportunities to understand what was going on much more so than you know, the typical diplomatic cocktail party chit chat with coat and tie. And in some cases, I roped some of my staff to come to play sports or to run the Hash. And you know, one of the things I like about sports is it's an equalizer. If—you could be the doorman or you could be the ambassador. On the Hash, if the doorman's the stronger runner, he's the stronger runner (laughs). There's nothing about credentials at that point. And that was another way to sort of connect with people on a human level, not just—. So, I looked for opportunities to connect with my staff as a fellow human being more so than as a boss. I mean, there—obviously there are times when you've got to make decisions and not always popular decisions but generally, I managed by consensus and I found that people who knew you as a human being versus as a work associate– it was a more productive relationship.

Q: Did you go back and have contact with any Peace Corps volunteers?

CLARK: I've stayed in touch with a couple volunteers. In fact—

Q: The volunteers in Senegal I mean.

CLARK: Oh, in Senegal? Well, on the softball field, when the volunteers came into town they would play. And we had a big softball tournament called WAIST, the West Africa

International Softball Tournament, and I think one year we had twenty-three teams. We had a Peace Corps team from Senegal. I think we had a couple Peace Corps teams from Senegal, a Peace Corps team from Mauritania, a Peace Corps team from the Gambia. So, when young people came to town and were looking for something fun to do, those who did sports in college or wherever would show up on the softball field, so. I did not see volunteers very often in the field, however, with some exceptions. Occasionally you'd have a program that was in an area where there was a volunteer. That was, I think, more—if I think of where that was most often the case, that was in Uganda. And I was also good friends with the Peace Corps director in Uganda, so that maybe also helped. We had an education program, they had an education program and so, there was an overlap there that was fruitful for the volunteers as well as for the AID people.

Q Good. Well, finally on the softball side, what position did you play?

CLARK: I played mostly shortstop. If I was the organizer, I got to pick my position, so I picked it.

Q: So, then your four and a half years is a good long tour. Who replaced you?

CLARK: Olivier Carduner.

Q: Oh, I know Olivier, yes.

CLARK: He came after. Later, after I retired in 2007, for another ten years—I guess until 2018 I did short-term assignments. Sometimes, what do they call it -a STAR appointment, Short-Term Acquisition Resource or something like that, mostly as a personal services contractor. And sometimes I was the acting mission director, sometimes I was just an office director but filling in here and there. And I ended up working for or—after Olivier left the regional office in Bangkok there was a gap between him and his—the incoming mission director and so I was the acting director there for a couple months.

Q: All right. Then, by this time, when you left for Nepal, how old were your kids?

USAID/NEPAL

CLARK: When I left for Nepal, the kids were, let's see, I was, that was 2003, so the oldest had graduated from college. At that point the youngest, let's see, 2003, he would have been just starting college.

That was also part of my thinking, that after four years in Nepal my youngest would have graduated from college, we would have had the resources, hopefully, to get our kids through college and that also played into my thinking about retiring and what have you.

Q; So, was it a good transfer back to Nepal or—?

CLARK: Yep, yep. In fact, that was another trick that I learned. If you did a direct transfer and deferred your home leave for a couple months, I mean, previously I mentioned about timing and making sure you lined up when you could go and when there was an opening. But it worked out nicely for us in going back to Nepal because you go there for a couple months, you see what you want to have wherever it is you are and you go on home leave and get what you need and bring it back with you when you begin your first full tour. So, I did two tours. Each time I was mission director I did two tours, two tours, two tours.

Q: And the program in Nepal was smaller, is that correct?

CLARK: I'm trying to remember numbers. It may not have been much smaller. It may have been similar in size to the program in Senegal. But fairly early on in the time I was in Nepal there was a Maoist insurgency which initially started in a relatively small part of the country. It was an area where we had one of our major AID programs. And then, over the course of the time I was there it spread to—essentially reached the entire country and ultimately led to the demise of the king, who stepped down. So, much of the time I was in Nepal it was, unlike when I was there in the eighties, there were significant restrictions on where you could go safely and that—those areas shrank during the four years I was there. There was fighting and bombs and riots, even in Kathmandu there were a few times when it got rather hot.

While I was in Nepal I went to Afghanistan with the defense attaché, a Nepali general and the vice chairman of the Nepali planning commission to look at the, what were they called? PRTs, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, I think, and to see if we could learn some lessons about how to do development in the midst of conflict. And the long and short of it was there really wasn't that much we could transfer from Afghanistan because we did not have that heavy U.S. military presence. So, in Afghanistan, whereas you could be doing development and call in air support if you were under attack, that was not the case in Nepal. And to be frank about it, the situation in Nepal, though it was in conflict, wasn't nearly as much of an ongoing war as Afghanistan.

Q: Very interesting.

CLARK: It was interesting going, spending a few days in Afghanistan. That was enough time for me in Afghanistan but riding in these helicopters where you had these machine gun guys hanging out the sides of the helicopters, I felt like I was on a movie set.

Q: Was your program significantly limited because of the unrest in Nepal?

CLARK: It became limited in some ways, particularly for the ability of expats to monitor programs, not just AID office employees but our implementing partners to the extent they were expat as opposed to Nepali. The U.S. became kind of the number two enemy of the Maoists because we put them on the terrorist list.

Q: Oh.

CLARK: But by the same token, the Maoists were looking to win the hearts and minds of the population and if you had programs that were of benefit to the general population it would have been a tactical mistake for them to shut down all of those programs. One activity in particular that continued to run quite smoothly was the distribution of Vitamin A to children I think between the ages of six months and five years. An annual dose, maybe twice a year, I forget now, of Vitamin A had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of children. And the way the program was run was with the ministry of health in Nepal, like much of the developing world. was their outreach into rural areas was quite limited but there was a program there with the identification of village-level health workers, unpaid volunteers who were trained and given a little kit and provided sort of some basic health services and one of those was the distribution of these Vitamin A pills that were—I believe it was a pill—that were distributed to the children basically throughout the country.

So, those kinds of activities—in fact, there was, anecdotally, there was a story of a village where the Maoists went into the village, talked to the village and said, "We've got to take over your village. We're going to burn down a building. And we are thinking of burning down the health post." And the community said, "You can burn down a building, just don't burn down that one, burn down something else." So, I think they burned down the forestry department's building in that village. But as sort of an interesting sort of side note to conflict and the relationship between rebels and communities.

Q: Well. Go ahead.

CLARK: We also had some tragedy while I was mission director in Nepal. We lost one of our direct hire employees to melanoma, skin cancer.

Q: Who?

CLARK: Peter Kresge. Diagnosed in June, dead in August.

That was quite a blow. And then, subsequently a helicopter crash where we lost Margaret Alexander. She was our deputy director. And Bigyan Acharya, a senior FSN who was on the helicopter along with a bunch of World Wildlife Fund people, the Finnish chargé d'affaires. They all died in a helicopter crash. And so, that presented some sadness and difficulties, you know, sort of overcoming that tragedy. I mentioned sports before. I didn't get the Nepali staff playing softball. I got some running the Hash there but we used to play volleyball at lunchtime and one of the things I did in the aftermath of the tragedy was to try to build morale, if you will, was I challenged the women in the office to form a volleyball team and so we set up a women's volleyball team at USAID-Nepal, The office, while I was there was this old Rana palace called Rabi Bhawan. It had huge grounds, old, somewhat crumbly buildings, but it was quite an interesting office locale and we had plenty of room for a volleyball court.

Q: Nepalis are not very tall, generally.

CLARK: Nope, they aren't. In fact, one of the things I like about going to Asia. It's less the case now as people, Asians are getting taller too. But compared to Sahelians where I felt quite short at 5' 10". When I was in Nepal, I felt tall and that felt good. (Both laugh)

Q: Well. I'm reading here about programs to sort of provide jobs for ex-combatants that the mission set up vocational training and employment.

CLARK: Yeah. But we were still—while we were there, you know, towards the end with the king stepping down, that was the main, or at least it seemed that that was the main objective of the Maoist insurgency, was to end royal rule, royal power. And the king actually stepping down came late once the conflict reached Kathmandu and there were riots. There were a lot of people sort of joining the push who resented the royal rule, if you would. So, I wasn't really there very much for post-conflict. That came to a head towards the end of the time I was there.

But in preparation for it, one of the things that we were looking at was trying to deal with reintroduction of former combatants. And this was a sector that AID, again, this was quite a while ago, but it was relatively a new sector for AID at that time. And getting communities to accept people to come back and getting people who were previously fighters to go back and be something other than bandits, you know. And so, employment opportunities, I did meet with–during the course of the conflict there were some people who initially joined the rebels and then subsequently left the rebels for various reasons. And I can remember going to a camp of former combatants and talking to them about if you need training to reinsert yourself successfully into your communities, what kind of training would be most helpful. And so, in some cases, it was mechanics, electricians seemed to be popular activities for men, tailoring was a popular activity for women. And so, those were some of the areas that we focused on.

Q: One program that I recall Nepal was known for was its forestry, community forestry program. Was that still going on when you were there?

CLARK: Yes, it was. And in fact, there were areas—I was quite pleased. I was there in the eighties so '84 to '88 and then back twenty years later, 2003 to 2007. And there were areas of the Kathmandu Valley that were more forested in my second stint in Nepal than they were back in the eighties. And part of that was attributed to the community forestry program. There was also promotion of electric vehicles, removing some of the brick kilns, polluting industries in the valley. But one of the things about community forestry was that basically previously the government, the forestry department managed the country's forests and issued licenses to loggers to exploit, you know, this forest or that forest with very little supervision, to the point where forests basically were disappearing at a rapid rate. And the community forestry program, which was active in the eighties and continued since that time essentially gave management of community forests to the communities who depended upon the forests and who were much better stewards of the forest management as it was. And so, instead of clear cut, let's see how many trees, how fast we can cut them and sell them, it was much more of a sustainable management

model. And I believe that Nepal even today, I think, is viewed as a country with considerable success in the community forestry arena.

Q. Did you have HIV in Nepal?

CLARK: We did. We had HIV programs in Nepal. In fact, all three of the countries where I was mission director, we had very active HIV-AIDS promotion—prevention programs. It was much less of an issue in Senegal in West Africa, much lower prevalence than in Uganda. Nepal, it was an issue, but it was, again, relative to East and Southern Africa much less of an issue there.

Q: Maybe I'm off track here—but I had done work in South Asia, was director for South Asia for a while in the nineties, and one of the biggest use was flooding of the Brahmaputra and Ganges rivers in Bangladesh and how you live with the floods or stop the floods and all these waters come from Nepal. And there was always the question, is there a regional approach to dealing with water and water management and the dams that were being proposed in Nepal and elsewhere. Were you all involved in that issue?

CLARK: Somewhat. The issue in Nepal was most of the dams along the Terai, the sort of thin, flatlands that bordered India, most of those dams were built under agreements with India that essentially allowed India to manage the release of waters from those dams. So, technically, India was in a position to flood parts of Nepal in heavy rainy seasons to protect the—whether it was their hydro investment or farmlands below dams. So, just one of several instances where Nepal's kind of hostage, if you will, to Indian policies.

We did fund a few micro and mini-hydro programs. In fact, the helicopter crash tragedy I mentioned earlier, WWF, World Wildlife Fund who had lost the most people and USAID funded a micro-hydro project in the villages which sent rescuers. There was nothing to be rescued but they heard the crash of the helicopter and heroically attempted to get up to areas where they said even goats don't go because it was almost a sheer face of a cliff that they crashed into. And so, we built a micro-hydro project in that area in commemoration of the people who had lost their lives. But that was a small program intended to electrify a couple villages, not a major hydro power program.

Q: Well, Nepal is in a very precarious situation. Was there anything in your program that related to Tibet and people moving back and forth from Nepal to Tibet and the Chinese presence in Tibet?

CLARK: Nope, no, we didn't have anything specifically targeted to Tibetans. I mean, we knew Tibetans had Tibetan friends in Kathmandu, refugees who had come down. But we didn't have a Tibet program per se.

Q: Anything else about your years in Nepal? I know Nepal's a place where a lot of AID personnel always wanted to go on assignment. I guess you didn't have any trouble attracting staff.

CLARK: No, we didn't. I mean, much more difficult in Senegal, where you wanted French speakers. Being an anglophone country, that was not an issue for recruitment. I don't recall that being—you know, I think we were lucky to attract some very talented people. There's always a mix of people and some who are perhaps more productive than others but for the most part, we had, I think, quite a good staff there and talented local employees as well, very talented. In fact, my—the first time I was in Nepal we were recruiting for secretaries. This is back in the days when you know, most AID people didn't type pre-computer or computers were just coming in. And we advertised a position for a secretary and we had people who had degrees in zoology, masters degrees applying for these positions because it was a better job than what was generally available in the marketplace, so we had people who were much more talented than the job description than they initially went in. And the fun part there was to identify people who could move up and help them build their careers and move up as there were openings in technical positions.

Q: You had thought you would stay for two tours and as you were coming to the end of that period did you have any second thoughts?

CLARK: No, no. I mean, I was sort of sad to retire but at the same time looking forward to reconnecting with my American roots and moving back to small town New Hampshire. I found this coincided with—as you know AID goes through cycles where they're downsized - you get political decisions to hiring freezes or what have you. And so, in my post, roughly ten years' post—retirement AID career as a part-time personal services contractor I found that I was often asked to come and be kind of an almost an oral historian, you know, kind of a reminder of stuff that had done because AID went through this phase where it basically for a significant period of time bringing in new people and those people all kind of got old together and reached retirement and retired and then the spigot got turned—

Q: Or were kicked out.

RETIREMENT AND SHORT TERM STAR ASSIGNMENTS

CLARK: Or were kicked out. And then, they turned the spigot back on and so they had this influx of people. I forget now, there was some ridiculous percentage of AID direct hire population that had five or fewer years of experience and so, the challenge in different posts was finding people to mentor and help develop the skills of these newer, younger employees. And so, it was fun to be in a position to try to share whatever tidbits, useful suggestions, hopefully useful suggestions. I also found that working as a short-term, part-timer, it was, for me, much less stressful than being a full-time employee because, say, you were working in a mission with a difficult ambassador. You can put up with a difficult ambassador for a couple months, another thing to put up with a difficult ambassador for three months—three years rather, so. And some of the issues—one of the things that I, you know, points of contention with the State Department were—are you familiar with ICASS (International Cooperative Administrative Support Service)?

Q: Yes.

CLARK: Basically, shared administrative costs for different agencies at post. And basically, my view is that the State Department took advantage of all of their agencies at post to underwrite their administrative services. So, for example, if they want to send their personnel officer to a conference in Peru, we had to pick up 20 percent of the cost of that trip as a member of ICASS, whether we cared if he went to Peru or not. So, frankly in many regards a rip-off. Well, I didn't have to worry about those things as a part-time employee because those weren't issues that I was dealing with.

So, it helped ease my glide path to retirement because I—you know, some people, I think, reach the end of their career and they hang them up and that's it and they're fed up. I think that was somewhat the case of the mission director who preceded me in Senegal. But I didn't. That's not why I ended my career. I still liked what I was doing so this series of short-term assignments which I think the longest one I did was four, four or five months. More typically it would be oh, a month and a half to three months, three months a couple times a year, maybe I averaged four to six months of the year I was doing AID stuff for ten years after I retired. So, I was still sort of current, still had, you know, knew kind of who was who in Washington and continued to get to see a bit of the world. In fact, I went to—in some cases I went back to posts where I had served and in many cases I went to places I'd never been before like El Salvador or East Timor or Indonesia. So, that was a lot of fun.

I also found that I was working for people who used to work for me so the lesson learned there is, make sure you treat people nicely because you may end up working for them one day.

Q: Who were some of these people?

CLARK: Susan Fine was a junior employee. When I first met Susan, I think it was her—might have been her first—she might have been, I don't know if they were still called IDIs, in Uganda. She was mission director in Senegal when I went back. Peter Trenchard was another one. He was a contractor that I ended up working for out of Senegal.

Q: So, you basically, you were offered positions, you didn't accept them all, you sort of carried it out over half the year or five or six months a year.

CLARK: Yeah, that was another thing I liked about the short-term assignments. If I—you know, I told them I didn't do jobs in the winter because I had snowplowing responsibilities and I liked to ski. And so, I would get asked—in fact, I got more requests than I could or wanted to fill, sometimes frustrating if you had two at the same time that they both sounded interesting. But there weren't a whole lot, I guess not a whole lot of people doing what I was doing at the time. But I had as many, I had more requests than I needed, so.

Q: Well, I see that one of those short-term jobs was in Burkina Faso, your old stomping grounds.

CLARK: I went back there a couple times. That was the very first one and it came up—when I retired, we—I live in an old farmhouse and part of the house, there was an attached barn that was falling down, we tore down and we built an addition to the house. So, the first, oh, year and a half or so I was a builder. And then, out of the blue I got this request to go to Burkina to design a follow-on to a girls' access to education program that was building primary schools in rural areas where girls' education rates were particularly low. And one of those areas was the part of Upper Volta where I was a Peace Corps volunteer. So, I mean, it was one of these things where you know, if you could have said, "Well, if this comes along, I'll jump at it." That's what it was. So, I did that assignment and that kind of got me into the game. When I retired, I didn't necessarily think, Oh, I'm going to spend the next ten years doing four to six months a year of these short-term assignments but that kind of got me started. And I went back to Burkina a couple other times, most recently, I think, 2017 maybe, I went both to Mali and Burkina. So, I got two trips back to—2010 and again in 2017 I went back to Burkina.

RECENT INSURGENCIES IN THE SAHEL

Q: Let me ask you about the recent insurgencies— the arms flow from Libya originally, did you see this coming? What's your view on whether we should even have programs in places like Mali and Burkina Faso and Niger..

CLARK: I think yes, we should be there. What you can do though is terribly limited. For my Peace Corps experience and much of my career with AID, conflict was not an issue. Now it is not only an issue, it is *the* issue. And frankly, I didn't see it coming and it's not something that's easy to see a way out of. You know, some people describe it as a jihad, a religious war, an attempt to instill fundamental Muslim religion. I don't think that's really the issue. I think it's more criminality than it is religion. And unfortunately, with the proliferation of weapons it's easy for a few people willing to pull triggers to intimidate and take advantage of, quote, unquote, "regular villagers," if you will.

And I mean, just to give you, anecdotally, an idea of access to weapons, when I was in Uganda in the northeastern part of the country the sort of East African or Ugandan equivalent to the Fulani, the herders are the Karamajong, and they are famous, or at that time anyway, famous for herding their cattle. You'd have guys with a stool, a scarf, maybe a hat and an AK-47. And I was in that part of the country with my driver, just the two of us, and we had stopped alongside the road to eat a sandwich midday and a herder walked by with his AK-47 and the driver asked him if he would sell us his weapon and the guy said, "Yeah, I'll sell it to you." And it was going to cost $50 for an AK-47, which suggested to me that he could replace it for less than $50.

And traditionally, in the Karamojong to become a man one of the things that you had to do was to pull a hair out of giraffe's tail, there were something to do with women, and you had to steal a cow, that was to become a man amongst the Karamojong. And

traditionally, to steal an animal from somebody you had to be quite stealth-like, but with the advent of the AK-47 you'd just turn on a guy with a gun, you don't have to be stealth-like, you can just take the animal.

And that, in a way, is a little bit of a parallel to the whole conflict situation. The fact that the government is not present in the rural areas and not providing services or not nearly as many services as people need is an opening for rebels to, basically to set up shop and essentially run things. Unfortunately, it also plays into these ethnic issues and oftentimes it's the traditional conflict between farmers and herders, that the herder group is viewed as the bad guys. And so, communities of those ethnic groups tend to get targeted by the government, whether they're guilty or not. One of the studies in Mali when I was there on TDY ten years or so ago, one of the studies was looking at why did you join a rebel movement? And in many cases, in fact, this was the Fulani ethnic group, they joined in order to protect their community because up until that time they were victims of the—they were victims of other bandits, what have you, they were victim of government who thought they were bandits, and so they became bandits themselves, they joined groups to learn how to shoot weapons and then formed their own bandit groups to protect themselves and their communities. So, it's kind of a mess.

But I do think that we need to stay engaged. I think we need to help people survive and hope that at some point or other responsible, semi-responsible, semi-honest leaders emerge to govern in a way that addresses the needs of the population. The fact that it's difficult is not a good enough reason to stop trying, in my opinion.

Q: One of the similar, relatively new issues is the extraordinary amount of migration from the Sahel. Not just to Europe but also into the United States but especially to Europe. Did you see much of that and do you have a sense of why that expanded as much as it has?

CLARK: I did spend five, four or five months in Niger in, was that 2015 or somewhere around there. It reflects the security situation and more so than the security situation the economic situation and people are willing to risk their lives to travel across the desert, travel across the Mediterranean to Europe to find work to make money to support their families back in Country X, whether that's Senegal, Mali, Burkina, Niger, what have you. One of the main corridors was through Niger, through Agadez. My guess is that's still—is a major route for—you know, desperate people do desperate things, and take tremendous chances. I think to some extent particularly the Europeans have tried to look at ways to make it more appealing to stay rather than to try to migrate. But one of the factors that impacts this is the information highway. Even, you know, semi-educated kids see what's going on to some extent in the world on, you know, the internet or movies or TV or what have you and they say, "Oh, kids drive cars?" You know, whereas they may never have even aspired to drive a car they say, "I'd like to drive a car." Or "Kids drive motorcycles? I'd like to drive a motorcycle." Or "Kids have music? I'd like to have music." What have you.

And so, they're—they may only have the alternative of following their parents' footsteps, agriculture is not—it's a lot of work and with climate change is difficult and land is

getting carved up into smaller and smaller pieces, it's less lucrative of a business, I don't want to be a farmer, I don't want to have cattle. I want to be this, I want to be that." And unfortunately, the economic opportunities are few and far between. It's one of the reasons you see this migration. Again, for security reasons, but also economic opportunity the migration to the cities so the cities like Ouagadougou and when I was a Peace Corps volunteer fifty years or so ago was 100,000 people, I don't know how many millions it is now, but all of the West African capital cities have just grown tremendously. Not just West Africa, this is probably true around the world, the migration to urban areas for pursuit of income is a huge trend. So, it's an area that I don't think that AID has been nearly as effective as it could be. It's an area, I think, we should be doing more of, identifying economic opportunities for young people.

Q: On that theme, if you got one more STAR appointment to help the people in the Africa bureau put together a strategy for the Sahel, what would you focus on?

CLARK: If I had to pick one thing it would be girls' education. Educated girls are, you know, it's not just education for education's sake. It gives them greater economic opportunity, they get married later, they start having kids later, they have fewer kids, they have healthier kids. Educated women are more likely to value education and see that their children are educated-that would be my first priority. I think we should do more for girls' education, and not just be focused on getting kids into school. That's not enough. We've got to get them in there and you've got to get them past just basic literacy, fluency. And the nature of education should not just be the classics, it should be skilled—employable skills should be a part of the education. I think that would be the area that I would—that's where I would put my stickers.

We had a program in—a decentralization program in Senegal and they were trying to identify in communities what were the top priorities for the community. And they would have sessions with men and women and anybody might say, "I think we should build a road." Somebody else might say, "We should dig a well." Somebody else would say, "We should build a school." And you'd list all of these different possibilities and then everybody in the village was given two stickers to go up, essentially voting as a way of identifying what was the priority. So, my stickers would go for girls' education.

Q: Well. what would be your second sticker or what would your next two stickers go for?

CLARK: Well, I think economic opportunity, as I've mentioned, employable skills, not just, you know, and education. And when I say girls' education, I don't mean just girls. boys need education and employable skills as well. We've dabbled occasionally in vocational education but I don't think we've done nearly as good a job as we could.

Q: Right.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

Well, this has been a very, very fruitful interview and I think—I want to just come back to a few sort of summary questions for you, if you don't mind. And various topics that, when you look across your career, what are some of the things you're most proud of?

CLARK: Well, I think that trying to help people to have a little bit more is a noble pursuit. You know, going back to my Peace Corps roots and throughout my career that has been kind of my sounding board. I was amazed at how giving and hospitable people with almost nothing were. Somebody comes to a village and needs assistance, gets assistance. And these are people worth helping, in my education. And so, I do believe that the mission of USAID, Peace Corps, the NGOs, many NGOs, of helping people to have a little bit more is a noble pursuit and so whatever little contributions I may have made along the way I feel proud of that.

Q: Any low points you can identify in your career?

CLARK: You know, if I were doing it again, I could have managed my situation with my first ambassador as a mission director better.

Q: Right.

CLARK: Would have saved him, probably, some angst and me some worry. You know, I think that putting yourself in someone else's shoes is—if you can do that, you can better deal with that person and I could have done a better job in that regard.

Q: What did you learn about AID effectiveness and what areas do we work best? Is there any program—

CLARK: I think that when we do stuff that is locally identified as opposed to—you know, a lot of times our funding priorities come out of Washington, Congress decides we should be doing X, Y or Z, and so, we look to fit our X, Y and Z on Countries A, B, C. I used to see the challenge for much of my early part of my career I was a design officer, I would design new programs. And I used to see the challenge of it being talking to people at the community level, the village level, getting a sense of what they felt they needed, steering it through their—the host country bureaucracy, steering it through the AID-Washington bureaucracy and ending up with a project that somehow resembled where you started. And so, I think that local initiatives, I think that those are the best and they also work best when you secure talented implementers. And that depends on the nature of the program. In many cases, people from the host country, even from the ethnic group in a region, sometimes that's the most effective way to get good results. So, securing talented implementers is, I think, an important step in the process. Unfortunately, our procurement rules make that quite difficult but not impossible.

Q: You mentioned a couple of situations where you were starting to deal with or dealt with conflict resolution, the Casamance is a great example, Nepal. Any other lessons you have from dealing with conflict resolution and conflict management?

CLARK: Well, so I probably first saw it in Uganda, in northern Uganda as well, but yeah, each of those three countries where I was director and frankly, many of the countries, most of the countries I worked in after I retired, so from 2000, I guess one of the first one, I think, was 2009 to 2018, it seems like every country is dealing with conflict in one manner or another. And you know, I'm not sure that AID is the right vehicle for dealing directly with the perpetrators of conflict or with the government. I see our role as more one of helping the victims of the conflict survive the conflict until saner heads prevail. In some cases, if there is an opportunity for reinsertion of ex-combatants, skills, development training, et cetera, I like that model of the cultural weekends in Senegal as an opportunity to remind people that they can live peacefully together. I suppose if you could play God and reduce the number of weapons in the world, you could—but I don't think that's within AID's manageable interests. Too many guns.

Q: Right.

I'm just struck when you were talking about the issues in the Sahel these days about—and the migration issues, how similar that is to Central America in many ways and some of the things that AID has been doing in Central America sound like things that could easily be done in the Sahel. I'm not sure whether those are—how successful those are, but similar issues of trying to keep people employed and economically satisfied at home.

CLARK: Yep.

Q: I don't know how many young people you run into where you are in New Hampshire who are coming out of college or grad school or former Peace Corps volunteers. I hope you run into some and I hope you, when they ask you what they might do in terms of staying involved and getting involved with perhaps a career in international development, international work, what would you recommend to them these days?

CLARK: I think that maybe it's because it's the path I took, I don't know where—how—Peace Corps, I think, they pulled everybody in during the pandemic and I don't know where they've gone back and how much it is like it used to be. But—

Q: They've gone back to quite a lot of places now and ironically, I have two friends whose sons left last week, one to Morocco and one to Namibia, both in Peace Corps.

CLARK: I hope the one who went to Morocco avoided the earthquake. But I think it's essential to get grassroots exposure, grassroots experience, whether that's Peace Corps or an NGO. To me, if I think back to people who didn't have that in my career they never seemed to connect as effectively with people. And I think also you may academically say, "Oh, countries that have this need that," you know, it might be technically sound but it may fail because of the lack of a kind of a local connection. There was a story in northern Ghana many, many years ago of some agronomists who saw these huge, tall sorghum stalks and small heads of grain and said so much of the soil nutrients are going into building these mini trees and these small heads of grain, wouldn't it be better to have a smaller stalk and a bigger head of grain? And so, they, plant breeders developed strains

that would, in fact, do just that. And they introduced them but it turned out to be a failure for a couple reasons. One, the taste of the grain wasn't to the liking of the people, but another one was, and nobody asked the question, what do you do with these stalks of sorghum? They were used in fencing, they were used in roofing, they were used as cattle feed. They had many other purposes and the assumption on the part of the agronomists was well, it's to grow grain. So, having that local kind of connection, I think, is vital and so I think for people to be engaged and one way or another they need to get that local connection.

And the second thing I would say to them is take advantage of this to see the world. The world's a fascinating place and you can learn stuff in one place that you can apply. Not always. I mean, I'm sure you ran into people who said, "Oh, well, in Honduras we did it this way, so we're going to do it this way in Morocco," or vice versa. And sometimes it's appropriate and sometimes it isn't. But I think the more different countries, cultures you experience, the better you are at doing development work. So, those would be my, I think, major recommendations to young people today.

Q: Good. Thank you. I always like to end my interviews by asking what questions I should have asked you but I didn't.

CLARK: I guess the question would be, would you do it again?

Q: All right.

CLARK: And in my case, the answer is yes. I might have done a couple of things differently. As I said, seeing the world, I think, is kind of not only personally satisfying, but also, I think, makes you more well-rounded. I never did have a tour—I thought I was going to get assigned to Bolivia once, so an assignment to Latin America, South America that I didn't have, maybe I would have tried a little harder to get one of those in. But I'd do it again, no question.

Q: Right. Well, you obviously have been in demand as long as you wanted to be in demand. And I'm glad we had this chance to do this oral history because there's a great deal of valuable information there.

End of Interview