

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

J. MICHAEL CLEVERLEY

*Interviewed by: Stephanie Kinney
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Stephanie Kinney, and I am interviewing J. Michael Cleverly for his diplomatic service oral history done under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training ADST. Today is Friday, February 18, 2022. Mike, welcome. This is your first session. We're very excited to have you join the collection of oral histories and tell us if you would introduce yourself right now—who you are, where you live, what you're doing in life, your stage of life as it were. And from there, we will begin to learn about, go back in time and how you became who you are now.

CLEVERLEY: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Stephanie. Again, as Stephanie said, J. Michael Cleverley, that's the name I've used during my years in the Foreign Service. Mike was my nickname. My actual name is James Michael Cleverley and in these days of identities' being so important and easily compromised, I end up using James now because I can't get on a plane if I don't use my real first name and other things like that. So, James Michael Cleverley will show up in more recent records, but in the State Department, where I worked for 30 years, I was J. Michael Cleverley.

I retired in 2006. Actually, my wife Seija Kaarina Heimala Cleverley and I retired, because to her and to me, it was as much a joint endeavor as anything else. When we retired in 2006, we moved from Rome to Idaho—and that was a pretty big cultural shock, especially for Seija.

Idaho Falls, Idaho 1947-1969

My Background

I grew up in Idaho. One of the things I always regretted was that during all of these Foreign Service years when important things happened in my extended family, I wasn't close. So, we spent the last two years of my father's and mother's lives near them, living in a Rocky Mountain canyon above their home in Pocatello, Idaho. When they passed away, we moved to Fredericksburg, Virginia. We liked the area. I'm a historian by inclination, and Fredericksburg was perfect for a historian at heart. We lived on the Chancellorsville battlefield near Fredericksburg for about ten years, and then moved to Leesburg to be closer to our four children who lived in the Washington area. It seemed

senseless to travel up and down the infamous I-95 every time you wanted to see one of your children or grandchildren.

We've lived in Leesburg, Virginia for about three years. Since retiring from the Foreign Service, I've done different types of things. I taught at university. I've taught online school, I have taken short-term assignments with the State Department, and I wrote a book that I published and promoted in the United States since I retired. And I wrote another book that took me about five years. So, I spent a lot of my time writing and taking care of fourteen grandchildren.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: And it seems like life is very full and busy even though it doesn't have the great world-wide types of issues there in front of me like often happened in the Foreign Service.

Q: Tell us about your four children.

CLEVERLEY: We have four children. Three of them were born before I entered the Foreign Service, all within one year. Two were twins, and —

Q: That's a handful.

CLEVERLEY: We learned how things worked: we thought it might be nice to have a child, and suddenly we had three.

Today, our daughters Kristiina and Kaarina are both married and living in the Washington area. They have chosen to be at-home mothers. Mika embarked on a Foreign Service career. At the time of this publication, he's on assignment in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as Charge d'Affaires at the American mission to the African Union. Markus, our younger son, has a consultancy in the Washington area and travels often in the United States and abroad. But they all are here, or at least based here when not abroad as in Mika's case, near us. So, it makes it quite easy to see everybody.

Q: They all grew up with you overseas?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, they did. It was quite interesting actually. We had many memorable assignments and some in places, like London, that were culturally rich. Our kids were then teenagers. You know how teenagers are, especially when you have to move every three years or so. One of our daughters said she hated our lifestyle. She was sixteen, and we were moving back to Washington. She had been in high school track, cross country, singing and many things she liked to do. She was upset from leaving things behind and hated our lifestyle, she said, and really meant it. A couple years later when she was in college, she wrote to us and said she wanted to thank us for all of those great things that happened when she was growing up. She was taking an art history class, and she had already been to the museums where many of those paintings were hanging. So yes, they

grew up with us, and they missed it when they got older. It wasn't always easy for them to appreciate it when they were there.

Q: Yes, yes. Foreign Service life can be very challenging for children and for families. So, I hope that as we go forward, and particularly when we get to your career, that you'll feel free to include your wife and your children in your story as well. Because the life of diplomats is privileged, it's unusual and it, in some ways, favors family intimacy. And it's a pressure cooker if one survives it but it's also full of challenges for spouses and for children. And we want to make sure that if we don't have their actual voices, that they get due credit as well as part of your story because you obviously had as many roles to play as your wife and as your children—because diplomats, by definition, wear many roles or are responsible for many roles when they're overseas. They're both representatives of their country, of their family, of their friendship groups, of their professional concerns, of their passions and enthusiasms outside of the job as well. And those sometimes can be as important and valuable to diplomacy as the across-the-table talks.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I certainly agree. And I will talk about that at some length as well. You mentioned earlier that one of the things that is of interest here is what makes me, me. And it's pretty hard to talk about that in my case, at least, without talking about my wife Seija and my family.

Becoming Me

Q: Yeah, yeah. So, Mike, that's where we are right now—a wonderful summary and a tribute to you and your family. Let's go back to the beginning about what made you, you and how you and American diplomacy ended up working on each other for a lifetime. Who were your parents? Who were your grandparents? What's your family history? You said that you're a historian. You have, I suspect, researched your family. Tell us a little bit about where your mother and your father came from and whether your grandparents in particular had any influence on them and you.

CLEVERLEY: Okay, fine. Let me do that. When I reported for duty for the A-100, introductory Foreign Service officer class in January of 1976, I found that my experiences up to then were often outside of what I thought was the mainstream of many other officers I met. There were several reasons for this. One of them was that I was from Idaho. Another reason was because I had grown up swimming in canals and working in fields in a rural farming community, whereas many of the others I met there were from cosmopolitan New York or glamorous California. I was from a rural background and childhood. I was a Mormon, and that was different from most people I met. So, I had a religious background that was somewhat different from the mainstream Foreign Service.

Q: How would you characterize mainstream Foreign Service in 1976? Were most people religious but have a different religion? Or what do you mean by that?

CLEVERLEY: Well, the Foreign Service was, I would say, mainly Protestant and Catholic. Several officers also had Jewish backgrounds. I didn't find that religion played a big visual role in the interactions of people. Whereas coming from Idaho, in my high

school let's say, I was part of a Mormon group that made up about fifty to sixty percent of the student body. Religion was a big issue in a community like that, an everyday issue. I'll talk more about it later.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: I was also an economist. I had worked as an economist with a graduate degree in economics. That wasn't very common in the Foreign Service in those days when a lot of U.S. policy was guns and tanks. I found that we were transitioning during the '70s to a broader swath in diplomacy where economics played a larger role. And so, those I met at my first post had a different experience in life than I did, which wasn't a negative or a positive. It's just that I think I was part of a newer, more diverse generation of officers than had traditionally been the case.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: Idaho is an interesting state. Hardly anybody knows anything about Idaho. Idaho is in the Rocky Mountains, and while I was growing up, it only had about 800,000 people in it.

Q: Where were you born and what year

CLEVERLEY: I was born in Idaho Falls in 1947, right after the war. Idaho Falls was in the Snake River valley. The Snake River wound through southern Idaho, from an area near Yellowstone Park in Wyoming all the way to the Oregon border and then into the Columbia. The valley was about a mile high, and counterbalancing the often-harsh climate, the land was fertile—you've heard of Idaho potatoes. There were extinct volcanic craters everywhere, and the soil was affected by its volcanic origin. It was very rich, and it was very dry, and it was desert. To make it work, the early settlers had to build a canal network, an irrigation system, so there was water. And that's how I ended up swimming in canals all my summers because there were canals everywhere bringing the water to the crops, which otherwise didn't grow.

There weren't any big cities in Idaho. Idaho Falls had 30,000 people but it was a big commercial and agricultural center and also, surprisingly, a place of technological boom. The city was old by Idaho standards, but the oldest buildings were hardly sixty years old when I was born, built about the year my great-grandmother with her new husband stepped off the train from Utah. In the desert, about fifty miles outside of Idaho Falls, the Atomic Energy Commission had developed a huge experimental site for nuclear research. The Navy brought its sailors there to learn how to sail a nuclear submarine and the first electric light powered by nuclear energy was turned on at the site. We knew little about nuclear energy then, and local residents just called the whole place, "The Site." So, as I got into grade school, suddenly there were all these kids not from Idaho showing up in class and speaking with a southern accent. That was a big novelty for us. By the fourth grade my best friend was from Virginia, and we were memorizing the planets on our way to becoming astronomers when we grew up.

Q: What in heaven's name led the Navy to do its nuclear sub training in a place with no water? Because nobody else would ever think to look there for it or...?

CLEVERLEY: Absolutely. They did not try to submerge. No water and only volcanic rock under about two inches of snow.

Q: I decommissioned a nuclear training reactor on site in Paldiski, Estonia, which was where the Russians trained all of their summer nuclear submarine people. But I must say, doing that in Idaho is counterintuitive.

CLEVERLEY: For one thing, the program was secret (except we all knew about it). And for another, I think there was a concern that as they started doing serious research in nuclear power, one of these things would blow up.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: For safety reasons, they went out about as far from people as they could.

Q: Interesting. But Idaho Falls would be expendable, it only had 30,000.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, it only had 30,000. No one might even notice. But that's what was happening.

Q: Where is Rocky Flats, the—is that in Idaho or—

CLEVERLEY: There is “Craters of the Moon,” if you're thinking of that?

Q: No, I was thinking if Rocky Flats is part of the National Lab System?

CLEVERLEY: Oh, I don't know.

Q: And it just occurred to me, it's out there somewhere, I'll have to look it up. But it's, you know, the labs were similarly located in places that were the opposite of urban centers, shall we say. Like Los Alamos.

CLEVERLEY: Los Alamos, New Mexico and Idaho. Overall, it was not a very diverse community, but it was safe, and we were free. We spent the summers working on farms or in the mountains. It was an easy, relaxed life. I'll say more about my heritage next, but I can say that the population was an old-style rural community where few people had college degrees. However, they saw college as the way forward amidst the transitions of the 20th century and wanted their kids to have college degrees. And so, there was a lot of emphasis on having decent schools and trying to help kids have aspirations to go to university after they graduated. The schools were actually quite good given that they were relatively resource poor. They didn't have a lot of resources, but they offered a great

curriculum. There wasn't much racial diversity. I knew a couple of Asian kids in our school. There were no Black Americans at all in our high school.

Rural communities like Idaho Falls, barely a few decades from the hard life of the Old West, had their own way of seeing life. I was brought up on the parables of the New Testament and the fable of the ant and grasshopper. The first taught you to take care of your neighbors, especially those needing help. The second taught that you worked, or you starved. We had sympathy (and an open hand) for the humble and needy, not quite so much for the rich, and not much at all for those who didn't work hard to earn what they needed.

In our schools, churches, and town, there were a lot of cultural opportunities, drama and music and tons of clubs and all of the things that could enrich you. If you didn't actually grow up in Manhattan, you at least had an exposure to some of the things that were bigger and broader than our community and to some of the things you might want to follow as you got older.

Q: Did you have television?

CLEVERLEY: Our town got television in 1952. We had one station and then we got two. And so, we grew up with two stations, and that was amazing to us. Everybody followed the weekly shows such as the Lone Ranger and Rawhide that came on about the time school got out, and I Love Lucy and others a little later in the evening.

Q: Did you watch Bandstand when you were a teenager? Dick Clark?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, and that was fun. It seemed like a big world out there. We watched Bandstand because nothing quite like that was yet happening in our town.

Q: Yeah. Did you see the inauguration of Disneyland in California in the late '50s on television?

CLEVERLEY: I don't know if we saw the inauguration, but we saw the show.

Q: Disney World.

CLEVERLEY: *Disneyland* came on once a week, on a Sunday afternoon in our community. And that was something we dreamed about.

Q: How did your family end up in Idaho? People associate Utah with the Mormon migration to the West, but it sounds like Mormons also were very important in settling Idaho. Is that correct? How did your family get there?

CLEVERLEY: Well, people don't know that the Mormons actually settled throughout the West. When the Mormon migration first reached the Salt Lake valley in 1847, that was quite early for the West. Salt Lake was the only sizable city between the Mississippi and

San Francisco on the Pacific coast. The Salt Lake Mormons quickly spread out. Las Vegas and San Bernardino, for example, were settled by Mormons. They also moved north.

In my family were two branches, my mother's, and my father's. My father's people were Mormon immigrants from England and Scandinavia, mainly Scandinavia. Some of them left Sweden and others came from Birmingham, England, about the same time. Most traveled across the plains in ox-driven wagons and reached Utah in the 1860s. From there, two families went to Idaho in search of homestead plots as free Utah land began to disappear.

My mother was a convert to the religion. Hers was the traditional westward moving family. Her great-grandmother who lived next to her when she was a child was from Rhode Island. Her family had been in Rhode Island for ten generations and went back to the Great Migration period in American history in the 1630s. Many others of my mother's ancestors were among the earliest settlers of New England and New Amsterdam. Some stayed in Massachusetts in the Puritan Colony, but many of them were exiled to Rhode Island because they didn't conform with the strict Puritan ways of thinking and doing things.

Q: Part of Rogers Williams—

CLEVERLEY: Anybody who wasn't totally orthodox in Massachusetts, and that was a fair group of people, was thrown out. Roger Williams was one of them, and he led the party that established Providence Plantation, Rhode Island. But soon there were a lot of other people expelled under horrible conditions. We forget. We keep thinking when we have Thanksgiving, "Oh yeah, these are the people who brought freedom and liberty and democracy to America." They weren't that. That's not who the Puritans or the earlier Pilgrims were. These people sought a place where they could practice their religious views, but only theirs. Before many of my ancestors left England, they were a variety of non-conformists who had suffered from the Church of England. Coming to America, they were seeking a place of religious freedom. As soon as they got to the Massachusetts Bay Colony or Plymouth, however, they found out that Puritanism was as oppressive as the Church of England had been.

I have been fascinated to find how many of these ancestors who stood alongside Roger Williams really did believe in democracy, the freedom of the individual, and in many things that were antecedents to the American experiment. That all happened first in Rhode Island, not in Massachusetts. For the first hundred years in the New England colonies, it was Rhode Island where the seeds of democracy, the abolition of slavery, and many other American values were born and practiced. And the Puritans hated them for that. Anyway, that side of my family, with its Rhode Island roots, had an unorthodox tradition. They kept it coming down through the generations.

Q: How did your mother meet your father? Your father was a Scandinavian immigrant way out West, and she was a Rhode Island girl.

CLEVERLEY: Okay, well, let me talk about my father. The Idaho Falls community was made up of maybe half Mormons, my father's people. The other half were mainly those who started out in the East and kept moving west over the generations. My mother's grandmother left Rhode Island, went to Missouri and then to Kansas; they had two tornadoes tear their house down. And they kept moving west, ending up in Idaho.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: My father's family, on the other hand, was from the Mormon immigrants in the Utah area, in the outskirts of Salt Lake. They moved to Idaho to homestead, to get land. As the Salt Lake valley filled with people, the opportunity for farming started getting less and less for the younger generations. And so they looked for places where they could find land and saw the Snake River Valley that was just being opened up. Dad's grandparents were some of the first settlers in the Snake River valley. They came, they built the canals to carry water from the surrounding mountains, and they started farms. As it turned out, he and my mother went to the same high school where they got to know each other. When World War II began, he ended up flying from aircraft carriers in the Pacific. He would come home in this uniform with wings, snazzy look-at-me and all, and was a catch.

Q: And a cosmopolitan now, a man of the world. [laughter]

CLEVERLEY: That's right. Been around a little bit and, of course, they fell in love and got married and actually had a very happy marriage. They lived sixty years together and were clearly soulmates with very different backgrounds merging there in this rural area. Those were the two sides of my family.

Q: Could you clarify because I heard you say that your father was a Scandinavian immigrant, and it sounded like Mormon. Was the Mormon affiliation acquired after he got to the States or are they in fact, Scandinavian Mormons, which would be new to me so I'm curious.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, let me be clear about it. He was not an immigrant. His grandparents were.

Q: His grandparents were immigrants.

CLEVERLEY: One set of grandparents were from Wiltshire, England. Another grandmother's father was an immigrant from Birmingham. And then his grandfather's family were immigrants from Malmö, Sweden.

Q: Got it.

CLEVERLEY: And Mormons were an evangelical religion. They sent missionaries.

Q: Yes.

CLEVERLEY: Mormon missionaries. *The Book of Mormon* still plays on Broadway and so on. And so, these missionaries started out going into your—

Q: So, they were doing mission work from the very beginning, even in the 19th century? It was not once they got settled and established and had the money to send people out, globally, that that began.

CLEVERLEY: No, the church was organized in 1830. And by the end of that decade, the end of the 1830s, they had missionaries all over the States.

Q: Wow. Yeah, that's fascinating. Yeah, I didn't realize it was that early. That's very interesting.

CLEVERLEY: Why did these Mormon ancestors leave their homes for the American West? It was a very oppressive time in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia where the Lutheran church made up ninety-five percent of the population. If you weren't Lutheran, you weren't accepted in society. In addition, you had the old systems where a person might be born a sharecropper, and there wasn't much hope of ever getting your own farm. So, if a family converted to Mormonism, many things surfaced quickly. First, they were ostracized from society, often quite severely. Getting away from that was a form of salvation, itself. And the idea of migrating to the United States where they might homestead and get a piece of land dominated the thinking of most converts.

Q: A land of their own, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: A better life for their children. It was a powerful motivation for them. So, this Mormon migration started in the late 1830s and continued in full swing up to about 1900, with tens of thousands of people coming from Scandinavia, Britain, and Central Europe. At one point in Salt Lake, there was a huge Scandinavian population, and there were more people born in Britain than born in the United States. So, it was a very diverse community in that sense, at least among the white community.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: So, that's how my father's family ended up in Idaho.

Q: Yeah, fascinating. Absolutely fascinating. The Mormons, it sounds like, were dominant in the area of the Snake Valley River. Was the other part of the community, largely Protestant or Catholic or non-affiliated? What was the other dominant cultural, religion-cultural strain in the Valley?

CLEVERLEY: The community was about fifty-fifty Mormon/non-Mormon, and they all got along quite well. There weren't the religious frictions there had been in the 19th century. The non-Mormon community was mainly Protestant. There was one Catholic

church in the town, but it seemed most people were Protestants. There were a few Jewish, maybe in the city itself. I was on the rural outskirts where there might have been a little bit more racial diversity, but not very much.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: It was interesting for me when I was reading my great grandmother's story about when she came to Idaho. She got married as a young bride and her husband said, "We're going to Idaho to homestead a farm there." Everything sounded nice, but she was a gentrified young lady. She played the piano and the organ and was very intelligent.

Q: She was East Coast royalty.

CLEVERLEY: She graduated from high school, and not many girls did.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: So, going to Idaho was kind of an iffy thing, but he made it sound like a romantic new life for them. The young couple left Utah by train, and when she got off, it was sagebrush as far as you could see. No trees, no water. Nothing. It was extremely depressing for her, and she tells about this in her writings.

Q: Did they have to construct the sod house first to live in? Before they were able to build a house of timber or did that figure in the story?

CLEVERLEY: There was not enough grass to build a sod house. Before she arrived, my great grandfather had gone into the mountains to cut timber, put it in the Snake River, and floated down with it.

Q: Floated it down, wow.

CLEVERLEY: He nearly drowned. He didn't have much left, only his pants on, when he got out. Then, he built a little cabin for her, and she would climb on top of the cabin, she was so homesick. On top of the cabin she could see the railroad in the distance as the train puffed north. She knew that same line went by her house in Utah.

Q: Oh my word. Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: Anyway, there was one family there she mentioned, a Black American family who lived nearby. How they got there, who would ever know. But from the very beginning of their arrival, the family befriended them and provided them things to eat. They were friends. So, there was at this point some racial diversity, but there wasn't much when I was growing up. It was a very white Protestant community. Interestingly enough, I never knew prejudice. My grandmothers on both sides were both religious in different ways, but the idea I received from them was that we were all God's children. I never had

any sense of racial prejudice and never sensed it when I was growing up. It was only when I moved to the East that I saw it more: the stories of segregation and civil rights, the demonstrations, and the great movements that brought civil rights to the United States in the '60s. We watched these on TV, but it was hard to totally comprehend them, because we didn't know anything about segregation.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: We didn't know anything about the suffering that people had gone through. We knew about the Civil War, and that the slaves had been freed but that's all we understood.

Q: Yeah. No, I grew up in the segregated South, and I didn't know that it was wrong or bad or it was just, when you're a child, that's the way it is.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. That's been one of the beauties of my lifetime, to see how we've got—not completely past it all—but I mean, I think we've made progress.

Q: Tremendous progress, yeah. Long way to go, but still progress. The arc is bending in the right direction, at least, or has been—we'll see in the next couple of years. So, your parents meet, what do they do after the war? How many brothers and sisters did you have? Where did you go to elementary school? You've spoken about the fact that the schools were good. Do you have any memories about those early formative years that you'd like to share?

CLEVERLEY: I do. I have a good memory. My earliest memories are from the time I was about two or three years old. But getting back to my parents, in 1945 just after the war in Europe and Japan was over, my father was home on leave for Christmas when he and Mother met again. They had dated each other a little in high school. Dad had always felt bad because his family was poor, but she learned this for the first time on one of those leave days when they were together. A few years ago, while my sister and I were taking Mother to valley cemeteries on Memorial Day, she showed us the place where Dad's modest house once stood and said, "I kissed him here. That's the first time I kissed him." Although my mother had known my father for quite some time, she had never seen the house before they visited there that day. She asked, "Why haven't you ever shown me your home?" He answered, "Because I was embarrassed that it had no paint." Mother looked at my sister and me and pointed with her finger, "I felt so moved that he felt that way that I kissed him right there."

That was the first kiss, and it wasn't much longer before they were engaged. They married in March. My mother went down to Alameda, California where his carrier was based. They lived together for a few months until he got out of the Navy, and then returned to Idaho Falls

Going back to Idaho. Dad had been around, traveled all over the United States for training, flown in Hawaii and so on. It was different to come back home. He got a

job—the best job he could find at the time—at Montgomery Ward selling tires. Mother, during World War II, had almost finished her college degree. But because school teachers were in such short supply, schools were hiring them even before they had finished their bachelor's degree. So, she had interrupted her schooling for a couple of years towards the end of the war to teach. When the young couple reached Idaho again, she wanted to go back to university, and he wanted her to stay home and have children. I don't know how much of a conflict that was. It certainly would be a problem today. But then she had me. She didn't go back to school. Throughout all my school years, she substitute taught. But she never finished her degree, which I know was a great regret she always carried.

Q: Yeah, that was true for many, many women of her generation, that the end of the war was a game changer for women. It put them back in the box.

CLEVERLEY: Especially after being out of the box, you know, carrying on so much of the economy as women did.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: It was worse than never having been out of the box probably. But anyway, they were happily married, and I guess that mattered more to her than anything else.

Q: So, you were the first child. Were you the only or did others follow?

CLEVERLEY: I was the first of seven children.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: Catholics often have large families but traditionally so do Mormons. In my community, seven children were not considered anything too extraordinary. Lots of my friends had large families. For then and there, it was normal.

Q: Did that put a special responsibility on you as the oldest, and also you happen to be a male?

CLEVERLEY: I was four years older than my next sibling, Lorilee. Four years, when you're in grade school, is quite a large difference. When I was in the sixth grade, my next younger sister was in the first. I was a babysitter, and I helped with the house, sometimes cooking, too. But it wasn't the same social sibling relationship that we would have had if we had been closer in age. Our three children, who are almost all the same age, are as close as could be, as much friends as siblings. So, I was more of an older figure in the household who enforced the law and did things that needed to be done. When I went to school with my sister I would walk her to her class, and things like that. It was a large family, not wealthy, but I would say ours was a middle-class life, at least in our community. Dad sold insurance and managed insurance agencies, and we got by. With seven children in a community where people aren't very well paid to begin with, no one

ever felt well to do. When most people are in the same situation, however, none of us felt poor, either.

Q: Did your father receive any GI (government issue) benefits when he returned, or did he not have time for that given the family responsibilities?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, he was eligible for GI benefits. And it would have been easy because there was a four-year college down the road twenty miles. So, he could have, but he didn't. He wanted to go to work. He was an active worker, he loved to work. He liked being a father, and he liked being a husband. It was really a very traditional patriarchal family. My mother, coming from her unorthodox heritage, was not easily intimidated or subdued. Nevertheless, the practice of the father working and the mother staying home with the kids and having a big family, the American ideal a hundred years ago, shaped the home that I grew up in. I didn't know many kids whose parents were divorced, and I didn't know many kids whose mothers worked. That's how 1950s America seemed to function.

Q: Yeah. And when that's the dominant mode for the community, it tends to be very stable, very reinforcing, I suspect. I grew up in a small town in Central Florida. We sound like we shared many similar experiences, including mothers who were city girls who ended up in the country. So, any other grade school experiences that stuck with you? And then we want to talk about high school, that's the setup for what you become later on?

CLEVERLEY: Well, you know, I went to grade school like everybody else. I liked to write, and the teachers noticed that, and some of the little things I wrote ended in our local newspaper. Once a month the paper had a page devoted to things kids wrote. Growing older I forgot about this, but going through my mother's old papers, I found some clippings of things I wrote as a seven- or eight-year-old that were put in a local newspaper. So, writing, something I still enjoy, was from those early years.

Let me just tell you about how Mormons fit into a community, because that had something to do with this too. The Mormon religion has a lay priesthood. It has no professional priests or clergymen. Everything is done by volunteers.

Q: Yes.

CLEVERLEY: Another feature is that the religion tries to be very much a "way of life" as opposed to a place simply to gather on Sunday. The women had their own organization; men had their organization; young people twelve and up had theirs; and younger children, too, had theirs. They would have their own meetings and their own teachers. So, you didn't just go to church on Sunday. "Primary," the younger children, met late Tuesday afternoon. And on Thursday evening, twelve- to eighteen-year-olds got together. When we were building a new chapel, everybody worked together to build it. Everybody went after school and after work to the construction site, got a hammer or paint brush, and helped build it. Church thus consumed a lot of everybody's lives as opposed to the normal way many people joined in church.

And that's how we grew up. My mother was the head of the Primary organization and was very much involved with us children. This was, remember, the baby boom generation. So, there weren't just a few kids. She organized and ran 10-20 women teaching each week, along with activities and dedicated programs for the entire congregation, which we called a "Ward."

Q: Yes.

Formative High School Years

CLEVERLEY: At the same time, Mother started me with piano lessons when I was seven, and she made sure that I was in all of the church plays. Later, there were grade school plays. When I got into high school, I played roles in high school drama productions. She wanted me and her children to be as broadly based as we could. All this was based on the idea that if you wanted to get ahead in life and out of some of the dead ends that exist in small rural communities, you have to go to college. You have to have some talents that you can use to make yourself satisfied and see broader horizons. These things went into my childhood. It was a very actively engaged childhood in many different ways.

The high school I attended was in the country, surrounded by fields of wheat and alfalfa. The high school served many of the rural suburbs and towns around Idaho Falls. There were a couple of high schools in the center of the city for the city kids. Our family lived in a subdivided suburb, not on a farm, but probably half of my friends lived on farms.

Once in high school, what I needed I thought was to get a part-time job. I don't know how it was where you were in Florida, but for many baby boomers it was hard to get jobs as teenagers because there were so many of us. We needed cash, and it was very difficult for us to find work during the summer. So, during the summers, my friends and I sought work on farms as "contractors." We would drive around to a farmer who needed his hay gathered from the field and stacked. We said we would do it for him, and this is how much it will cost. Many were happy to have us do it. I guess we were fifteen or sixteen. We were still strong enough to do things like that.

Q: Yeah, well, agriculture was your industry. Agriculture was the industry in my small town in Central Florida—oranges. But there was practically cheap, you know, non-costly Black labor to do those jobs. Our youth and our communities and our small-town cultures sound very, very similar. Mine being organized around churches, but all different Protestant varieties very much like yours was. But I was able to get a job in a bank because I knew the son of the owner of the bank. [laughter] And the agricultural work was not done by white people. It was done by Black people essentially. And that's, in some ways, probably unfortunate, both for the health and the stamina and the reality of the young people that grew up where I was born, as opposed to where you were born.

CLEVERLEY: Well, we never regretted it, you know. I mean, getting any job was good.

Q: Yeah. And work was good.

CLEVERLEY: And work was good. One summer, I spent several months in the Grand Teton National Park spraying trees that were being attacked by Rocky Mountain beetles. We lived in tents and slept in sleeping bags. And there was a big adventure and fun.

Q: Were you a park employee or were you a local contractor employee?

CLEVERLEY: We were a bunch of boys from our school, around sixteen years old. We worked for a contractor. The contractor happened to be one of the teachers at our school who was from Jackson, Wyoming. He got a contract that summer to spray these trees, but he needed somebody to do it.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: So, he offered it to everyone that wanted to do it. And we were a bunch of boys and one girl. Maybe there were twenty of us who went to camp out in the mountains.

Q: Now, how old were you when you started your first job on a farm? And I'm trying to get a sense of chronology here—were these jobs during teenage years or did you start working earlier than that?

CLEVERLEY: I started working when I was thirteen.

Q: Thirteen, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: Well, maybe even earlier than that, to a certain extent, because my grandfather had a farm and farmers in those years depended a lot on family at certain times of the year. Even when I was a younger age, I occasionally helped on his farm. For example, at potato harvest, schools would have “potato vacation.” The schools closed down for two weeks releasing all the kids to go to the fields because you did it by hand. The farmer would plow up the potatoes, and then the pickers would put the potatoes in baskets and sacks and so on. Ten years old was not too young.

Q: Well, that's why I asked. I suspected that was the case.

CLEVERLEY: I helped when my grandfather needed it badly: when he was lambing the sheep or caring for their lambs. I would spend a day or two. But the first real job I got was when I was thirteen. My uncle and my father had a wholesale business selling candy around the Valley to different stores and resorts. They hired me one summer to work for them, and I saved enough money to buy myself a trumpet. I had a new trumpet for the band. That was the first time I really worked. A couple of years later, my dad and another uncle had a business collecting milk cans from farms to transport to a Kraft factory to

make cheese. I went with him early in the morning to pick up the milk cans. They were big and weighed between fifty and a hundred pounds.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: We had to throw them up to two feet to get it onto the truck.

Q: On to the truck, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: So, I did that one summer. There were many things I did for part time jobs. When I was a senior in high school, I worked at a supermarket. For me, it was like a Cadillac-of-a job because it wasn't so physical.

Q: Was it air conditioned or not?

CLEVERLEY: Air conditioned? Yes, it was. I worked at everything from sweeping to running a cash register; and arrived fifteen minutes early to memorize all the day's produce prices. I was a sixteen-year-old cashier, and that could have been a problem. In Idaho you had to be eighteen to sell beer. The manager rigged a good solution. When someone arrived with beer in their shopping basket, I waved at an older cashier who ran over to punch the price into the register and quickly returned to their own stall. I guess I wasn't selling it if I didn't tap it into the cash register. Letter of the law, you see. So yeah, part time work was a big part of my childhood.

As my father began to earn more, we moved from a little two room house to a three-bedroom house, to a little larger house south of town, and all of that entailed changing grade schools. I went to three grade schools over my elementary school years.

Q: Was leaving grade school a big deal? Did you get graduated to middle school or was it called junior high? What was the next stage of your education?

CLEVERLEY: It was called junior high. There was no graduation from elementary school or from junior high. The community had built a new high school that they intended to fill up with baby boom kids one of those days. In the meantime, they had extra room. So, they moved the junior high to share the building with the senior high. They consolidated several smaller junior highs and several smaller high schools into one larger facility. In the seventh grade, we went to this junior high/high school, Bonneville Junior High, and Bonneville Senior High. It was named for an explorer in the American West. There was a pretty big difference between a twelve-year-old and an eighteen-year-old. But we all mixed in the halls. We didn't care. The new facility was modern and beautiful.

Interestingly, as few resources as the schools had in those days, they allocated them in ways that amplified the quality of the education, often much better than is done today. For example, one of my daughters was just living in Pasadena. They lived in a school district, a good school district, but there were no school buses. All parents had to bring

their kids to school. There was no music program, no drama program, or anything like them because the district couldn't afford it. The school kept sending little fliers home asking parents to donate money for anything special. That was never an issue in the junior high or the high school I attended. They built this new high school with a beautiful auditorium that had 600 seats and a wonderful stage. We had great music rooms for its bands and choirs. All these things were there, and no one asked for donations, not that most parents had much cash to donate anyway. All this was part of going to school.

Q: Did you have very many male teachers?

CLEVERLEY: In junior high, I think it was probably about fifty/fifty. And in high school, it was mainly male teachers. There were some females—maybe it was seventy-five/twenty-five. But in grade school—

Q: Were they paid relatively well?

CLEVERLEY: No, they weren't—

Q: And the schools were—what I'm hearing is the schools are pretty good and a lot of investment in them.

CLEVERLEY: In our school, they didn't pay very well, because Idaho is Idaho, and—

Q: But you got a lot of bang for your buck.

CLEVERLEY: In my experience, we got a lot of bang for the buck. Most teachers were actually great. Sometimes it was more like a type of a mission for them. I mean, they felt they were school teachers.

Q: Yeah, they were professionals with professional responsibility and care for the next generation.

CLEVERLEY: That's how they felt, exactly.

Q: And they were respected?

CLEVERLEY: And they were respected. Occasionally, the better teachers took better offers from neighboring states. One year, both band and drama teachers and some others left for better salaries. We were unhappy, and I circulated a petition with several hundred names on it to the school board. I got called by the principal to talk through it. "I just get the money they give us," he said. That is about as activist as our conservative student body ever got.

Q: Yeah. So, you went into junior high and that was associated with high school. Was it a big deal to become a high school freshman or not so much?

CLEVERLEY: I probably got the worst grades in my life as a high school freshman. I don't know what it was, I guess you are fourteen going on fifteen. It was hard to really bear down as much as you needed to—I needed to do anyway. In high school, there were a lot of diversions and distractions. So, there was an adjustment. Of course, it was in the middle of adolescence.

Q: Yes, never an easy time.

CLEVERLEY: All of that stuff going on. But everything was better after that. I got straight A's for the rest of high school. In both junior and senior high school we had six classes a day. Six teachers times six years, thirty-six, and one of them still stands out in my mind. Mrs. Buetler was an English teacher who was no one's favorite. She forced us to diagram sentences. A thirteen- or fourteen-year-old mind cannot conceive of a reason in the world why you would want to diagram a sentence. It just didn't seem reasonable.

Q: But you learn the parts of speech and how they were to behave according to the rules.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I learned that, and when I started studying Finnish a few years later, a very, very difficult language grammatically, it helped a great deal.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: I knew the difference between an object and a subject, and a preposition. In Finnish there were cases and postpositions. But I had the basic concept of what the structure of a language was. This helped me over and over during my Foreign Service years, not just learning other new languages, but also how to write English better.

Q: Yeah, and how grammar works.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that's right. I don't know if anyone ever personally thanked her for teaching diagrams, but I've been more than grateful for what I learned in that class.

Q: No, I had the same experience and I think a lot of our generation did to our advantage. I was horrified when I was asked to teach at the Colegio Americano in Mexico City in the early '70s because the writing was just atrocious. And I went to the English department, and I said, you know, I wasn't hired to be an English teacher, but this is abominable. I'm talking about the American students, you know. Forgive the Mexicans that were bilingual. And the response across the board at that time from the teachers was that grammar is too hard and it's boring. We teach creative writing. I said, "But you can't write creatively if you don't know how the language works. And you don't understand that there has to be agreement of subject and verb, and that you cannot use, you know, certain parts of speech, willy nilly." And I was really shocked at what had happened to the teaching of English since I was first exposed to it, even fifteen, ten, fifteen years earlier.

CLEVERLEY: I was too. I didn't have that kind of experience, but I saw it in the young officers in the Foreign Service whom I supervised. You know, the examination process is

very stringent and rigorous, but I was surprised how poor their English skills often were compared to what I knew as a younger officer. I guess, because the attitudes in schools have probably changed about how to learn English, or what you should learn about English, from when I was in junior high school.

Q: Yeah, interesting. So, what were your passions in high school? Girls?

CLEVERLEY: There were girlfriends, of course, nothing too serious or that lasted long. But I was into everything. I was really into drama and band.

Q: And you played trumpet. You had given up the piano for trumpet?

CLEVERLEY: No, I didn't give it up. I played the piano, I played the trumpet, I played the French horn, and I learned to play the organ.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: So, music was always a big thing for me. I was in a lot of plays. I was president of the thespian club. I was an officer in a lot of different clubs, vice president of the concert band, parliamentarian of the Science Club, a member of the Key Club and pep band, and in many other activities. I took home awards for drama and oratory. I just liked doing a lot of different things.

Q: Remind people what the Key Club was.

CLEVERLEY: Key Club was kind of like a junior auxiliary for the Kiwanis. Kiwanis was a social type of club that would try to make improvements in the communities around them.

Q: Community service.

CLEVERLEY: Community service.

Q: What were your favorite subjects?

CLEVERLEY: I liked history, I liked world affairs. I liked sociology. I liked the social sciences a lot. I did okay in math, but I had no aspiration to be a mathematician. I studied Russian for one year, then I had one year of Spanish.

Q: Wow, how did—tell me about how that came about. Russian was not something generally taught in U.S. high schools in the '50s and '60s. Notwithstanding the impact of Sputnik, which did help encourage Russian language study and Russian studies, it surprises me that you had Russian teachers in Idaho Falls.

CLEVERLEY: Well, it was really for that reason. This was the Sputnik—

Q: Or maybe it was nuclear training.

CLEVERLEY: It was Sputnik and the Cold War. As the Cold War raged and the space race took a turn with the Russian-launched Sputnik, there was very little Russian language capacity in the United States. The language was hardly taught in schools. So, the federal government came up with a program where a secondary school could start a Russian program and then receive a federal grant to equip facilities for the program. Our school reasoned that a Russian course could get it a language lab for all languages taught. There was a teacher who taught German, I believe, but who had also studied Russian in college. He became our Russian teacher. I think they thought he didn't have to be the greatest Russian linguist in the world because they could do most of the instruction by tapes in the new language lab. It became a nice modern lab for those days. So, as a freshman, I started Russian, a language I thought was exotic and had a role in the new world we lived in.

Q: And it introduced you to a language with a different alphabet.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it did. And it was a more difficult language. The following year, my sophomore year, I went to another high school about seventy miles away in American Falls, Idaho, because my dad's small company went under, and he took a job there. It was only a one-year thing and then we came back. But I couldn't take Russian 2 in the new school. I wanted to get in two years of language and took Spanish for my sophomore year. When I returned to my old high school my junior year, there was no Spanish. So, I had a year of Russian and another of Spanish. I thought the net result was useless. But I found years later that was not true. Both languages resided somewhere deep in my mind and were helpful for things I later did.

Q: A Renaissance man. What about sports?

CLEVERLEY: Sports. My mother babied me. She told me that she didn't want me to play American tackle football because those guys get hit hard and get injured. She didn't want me injured. She wanted me to do flag football which I kind of liked actually, but it wasn't played too widely. Baseball, I played a lot. When I was seven and eight, we had no baseball field and played softball in the streets. The problem, as my mother saw it, was that if you're going to be serious about piano lessons—and this was her idea—you had to come home from school and practice the piano. My friends were soon playing baseball down at a local park. When I joined them, I got in trouble for not practicing piano. So, I ended up not being very much involved in sports. I was in the pep band and traveled with the team whenever they played on the road. I enjoyed some of the excitement, but it was a compromise.

Q: That sometimes was a lot more fun.

CLEVERLEY: I wasn't a very big guy anyway, so football, you know, was not on my list. But it was not a problem. The school offered things for all kinds of interests.

Two things that happened during my high school years seemed to change the world we knew. People have always talked of the Kennedy years, 1960-63, as America's "Camelot." For me and my generation, and especially where I went to high school, they were kind of a Camelot full of sunny days and national confidence. But Kennedy's assassination was the beginning of the end of all that. The afternoon we heard the news, I was running the lights for a district drama festival our school was hosting. I turned on the mike and relayed the sad news to everyone there. Word spread rapidly throughout the school. Many people were distressed. One girl was crying hysterically in the hallway saying she had had a dream the night before of what had just happened. We all took the news hard. I'm not sure there was a causal relationship between the end of "Camelot" and Kennedy's assassination, but his death was definitely a point when everything changed.

However, there was a causal connection with the other event that happened some months later, the Gulf of Tonkin incident where American destroyers took on North Vietnamese patrol boats. That was the day Vietnam became a serious matter in my friends' and my lives. Vietnam did change everything for our generation. The next spring, we graduated and soon turned old enough to join the army or be drafted.

Leaving Home, 1965

Q: So, you graduated. When did you start thinking about college or were you thinking about college throughout?

CLEVERLEY: I graduated in 1965. But starting in '64, I began thinking about college. I wanted to go to the best college around and the best college I could afford. The universities in Idaho weren't that prestigious. Well, prestige is the wrong word. They were limited. The two best universities in the neighborhood were University of Utah and Brigham Young University. I applied to Brigham Young University and was accepted there on some kind of a small scholarship. I spent a year at Brigham Young University. and started getting interested in international relations issues. I had a roommate who wanted to go into the Foreign Service. I didn't even know what the Foreign Service was. Nobody did in Idaho. In fact, years later, when I was on home leave in Idaho, I went to a supermarket to write a check. They asked, "Where do you work?" I said, "I'm in the Foreign Service."

Q: They'd say, "We need more trees."

CLEVERLEY: Exactly. They responded, "The Forest Service?" When I answered, "No, no, I work for the State Department," the young lady looked blank and then asked, "The state department of what?"

Q: "Which state?"

CLEVERLEY: She probably thought I was in the Idaho state department of agriculture.

Q: Right. Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: I mean, they just had no idea. And I had no idea when I was a freshman. You know, I knew there were such things as embassies and ambassadors, but I didn't know what they did.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: I asked my roommate what you had to do to get into the Foreign Service. He explained there was an exam, and I think he probably added that you want to have a broad background when you take it. Well, I thought I had a broad background and enjoyed a lot of things, especially current events. During my last year of high school, I had read every issue of *Time* cover-to-cover, devouring everything from movie critiques to the expanding war in Vietnam. I changed my major to international relations. I was already eyeing the State Department then.

I had six roommates. We rented an apartment and had all the joys of learning to live away from home, ironing your own shirts, paying utility bills, and all of those things. But it was also an interesting time to get into international affairs. The first year of the buildup in Vietnam was hanging over all of our heads. What about Vietnam? And in those days, as long as you stayed in school, you weren't in Vietnam.

Q: Stayed in school, you were exempt. Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: I had a student deferment and knew if I dropped out of school, things would be much different. One of my roommates, once he got out of college, went right to Vietnam and was killed just after he arrived. It was a very real thing for us.

My freshman year, however, was a placeholder for me because what I wanted to do next in life was not a sophomore year. I wanted to go on a mission for the LDS Church. My parents and I had talked about it all of my life. It was something they wanted me to do, too. It offered the possibility of doing something a lot different.

Really Leaving Home: Finland (1966-1969)

Just before my freshman year, my parents had moved to Wenatchee, Washington, where my father became the manager of an insurance agency for Metropolitan Life Insurance. Wenatchee was in the center of the state and an apple capital on the Columbia River. It was a beautiful town and community. I spent that summer working in a large supermarket to save money to go on the mission. Mormon missions are self-paid. You pay them yourself or your parents send money every month. The church pays the trip to wherever you go, but after that, it's all on your own.

Q: You're self-financed, I didn't realize that. I always assumed there was a stipend.

CLEVERLEY: No stipend, so I saved money that summer. In late summer 1966, I applied for the mission call and received a letter sending me to Finland. A place like

Finland sounded exotic to me. Who knew anything about Finland? We studied it for maybe fifteen minutes during my high school world civilization class. At least, I didn't know anything about it and had much to learn. I knew Finland was on the border with Russia. I would have to learn the language there from scratch because there was no language school for Finnish. I soon found that the language was one of the most difficult. And I knew it was a northern frigid climate. But I was confident. Being from Idaho, I was used to the cold. I had studied some languages.

*Q: And maybe you had read *To the Finland Station*, or have you heard of it?*

CLEVERLEY: I had not heard of *To the Finland Station* or read books on Finland. But I was confident. Being from Idaho, I was used to the cold. I had studied some languages.

Q: Yeah. How hard could it be?

CLEVERLEY: How hard could it be? And so in September 1966, I arrived in Finland. It was snowing that day.

Q: Excuse me, but had you graduated from high school in '65. And you went to Brigham Young in 1970 for the first year?

CLEVERLEY: No, I graduated in 1965. My first year at Brigham Young was 1965-66.

Q: Was your first year, okay, at Brigham Young. And so then in '66, you did your Mormon mission to Finland?

CLEVERLEY: That's correct.

Q: Is that a year or two years? How long does the mission typically last? How long did it last in your case?

CLEVERLEY: In my case, it lasted thirty months, two and a half years.

Q: Thirty months.

CLEVERLEY: That was because it was a hard language, and no one really started speaking much until they had been there six months.

Q: Yeah. Did you go to school then in Helsinki in order to learn the language? Or did you just learn it by living with people?

CLEVERLEY: No. The way a Mormon mission is structured is you have a companion. You live together, and you work together. The companion is somebody who's been there longer. In my case, the first companion had been nearly a year and a half in Finland. He mentored me with the language daily. We were in Tampere, Finland's second largest city, along with eight other missionaries. I arrived in the fall, definitely the worst time of the

year there, when the temperature hovered in the low thirties, it rained at least every other day, and the next day was always darker than the one before. It was on the latitude of Anchorage, Alaska. After six to eight weeks, my confidence was no longer as high as it had been when I arrived.

This was again 1966, only about twenty years from the days Finland's war with Stalin finished in 1944. After the war, Finland was straddled with tremendous war reparations to the Soviet Union. After all the devastation and the losses Finland had suffered fighting Russia twice and Germany once during World War II, the country was still in the midst of recovery and still underhoused. Following the war, twenty percent of the Finnish population lost their homes to become refugees. The Soviets took over their homeland, Karelia.

There still wasn't a lot of housing and what existed had been built quickly after the war. So, apartments were scarce. My companion and I sub-rented just a single bedroom from a family who had a living room and two bedrooms. For them, it was kind of okay. Who likes strangers coming to live in their place? But at least it provided some extra income. I could greet them in Finnish; and they didn't speak a word of English.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: We were American Mormons, which were pretty strange animals in a Lutheran country. They didn't really want to have a lot to do with us. As long as we paid our rent, and we didn't create any problems, we were fine. But don't use the shower either.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: The days were long, from 6:00 am to 10:30. I spent the first two hours studying the language. Finnish is considered one of the hardest languages, maybe after Chinese. because of the complexity of the grammar, its unique vocabulary, and because it's not Indo-European.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: So, there were not a lot of similarities with anything we spoke or had studied. There are more similarities between English and Russian, for example, than there are between Finnish and Swedish.

Q: Even though there were a lot of Swedes in Finland.

CLEVERLEY: There were a lot of Swedes in Finland, but they weren't spread across the country much and lived mainly on the southern and eastern coasts. The Finns, of course, are proud of their language. It gives them an identity. They don't like to compromise their language by diluting it with other languages or borrowed words. But for somebody learning Finnish, it was a challenge. I remember my companion and I once walking down

the street when a lady called her dog, and the dog came over to her. He turned to me and said, "Did you see that?" I answered, "Yeah, I saw that. What do you mean?" He looked up and smiled, "The dog knows more Finnish than you do."

Q: Oh!

CLEVERLEY: It was very hard. Mormon missionaries have a tradition of learning languages quickly. Within two months they'll be speaking Spanish. With Finnish, it was at least six months before we had any degree of fluency at all.

Q: How did you learn it?

CLEVERLEY: I had written lessons which the mission office gave us. There were eighteen lessons, and we were expected to go through at least one lesson each week. We would send in homework and take a test at the end of the week.

Q: Wow. How did you practice? To know how to pronounce because part of the trick with Finnish is pronunciation also?

CLEVERLEY: Well, yeah, but pronunciation is not the most difficult part of getting some Finnish. There are a couple vowels we don't have in English, and then there are double consonants and vowels that need to be distinguished, much like in Italian. I memorized words, and we had dialogues we memorized. The first thing I learned was something to say when we knocked on doors. If somebody came to the door, what do you say? We learned, "We represent the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and we'd like to leave you a message." And the second thing I learned was, how to bless the food. So, if by chance anyone ever asked us for a meal, I could say grace in Finnish. You know, it was just a very simple prayer. One of my colleagues got flustered when a very pretty blonde girl came to the door. Confusing the two, he blessed the food right there on her doorstep.

So, that's the way we did it. We studied the language, we memorized the dialogues, and then we used the dialogue. Over time, we learned to converse. I don't know if you recall Rozanne Ridgway. She was ambassador to Finland.

Q: Yes.

CLEVERLEY: One of the greatest Foreign Service officers. She used to say that she only knew two types of people who learned Finnish: born Finns and the Mormon missionaries. That was true, we did learn, but it was really twelve to fifteen months before we felt we could talk about most things that came up.

Q: Yeah. Today, English is for all intents and purposes a second language for Finns, at least in the urban centers. I gather that was not the case in 1966.

CLEVERLEY: That was not the case.

Q: They were more likely to speak Russian or Swedish.

CLEVERLEY: Not Russian, they hated Russian. They spoke Swedish among the four languages they studied in high school: Finnish, of course, and Swedish, and then they could choose from German, English or maybe French or Spanish

Q: German, I was going to say.

CLEVERLEY: Because Germans had so much influence in that part of the world, generations of high school students during the first several decades of the 20th century studied German. It was just in the 1960s when it started to change to English. So today, yes, everybody studies English. I think most Finnish kids are now more fluent in English than they are in Swedish. You can't print textbooks in Finnish at a very reasonable cost and a lot of the textbooks will be in English. You really need to be proficient in English to study in university.

But those days, it was different, and I didn't speak any German. We met people and communicated best we could, learning as we went, and that went on, month after month. I actually enjoyed it. It was hard in the beginning, and depressing because I sat in those meetings without understanding a word. But with time, I started learning things and I started meeting people.

What was interesting about it was we weren't meeting people like those I met as diplomats in their offices. We met them in their homes. These were not the elite of society. These were everyday people. We met them in their homes, real people, ordinary people, families, and we learned to speak with them and to appreciate their qualities as Finns. I started to feel this was a culture that I admired and liked. I got inside it in a way that was very difficult for a non-Finn. In any other country, too, it is usually quite difficult for a foreigner to really get into the society, but it was, and still is, especially difficult in Finland. To me, Finland culturally seemed the full world apart that it was geographically – but that is what made it so interesting.

Q: All America knew about Finland in that time period was Marimekko and design. What was it that you learned that you saw, that made you feel respect and admiration and affection for people?

CLEVERLEY: Well, there were many things. However, I wasn't too much into fabrics in those days, so I didn't know Marimekko, but I was very much fascinated by stoneware, tableware, and dishware done by Finland's world class designers. One of the things that really got to me as I learned about the Finns was their experience during the very hard years of World War II. They liked to share them with me, an American. I think they wanted us Americans to know who they were. It wasn't like they were bragging. They just wanted us to understand. So, the older men—and they weren't even that old then, in their 40s and 50s—who fought in the wars sometimes told us their war stories. And the

older women, particularly the more senior women, told us of their escape from the Russians during the harried evacuation from Karelia.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: I remember one woman, perhaps then in her seventies, tell how during the evacuation ahead of the Soviet assault, she got on the train. Everybody was carrying whatever belongings they had to get out of Karelia. Russian planes began strafing, train cars were struck, and loved ones were killed. You heard these stories, and you knew these people had gone through a lot of things. They were very genuine. There were no superficial surfaces that you had to break through to get to know someone. If they liked you, they liked you. They didn't necessarily talk a lot, because most Finn, except my wife Seija, are a little shy. But you could break through because you spoke their language, and they appreciated that. They valued that you were trying to learn about them.

Q: Yeah. Did you find that music was a connector for you?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, they were very musical, and they had a great music tradition, as you probably know. And since I played piano and organ and they didn't have many pianists or organists, I got drafted to play hymns when I went to different congregations. I got to know people through music as well.

Q: When you say congregations, were those Mormon congregations or were there other kinds of gatherings?

CLEVERLEY: There were Mormon congregations, maybe at that time fifteen or twenty congregations in the country.

Q: And that would suggest that your message to them was welcome and of interest. It was different from the Lutheran dominant religion or faith practice or from the Russian Orthodox. What was your sense of what made your message welcome and persuasive to them?

CLEVERLEY: I think one of the things that made Mormonism attractive to them was that the LDS church was basically a middle-class religion. It developed forms of worship which appealed to the middle-class as it evolved on the American frontier, and it maintained that character. Later, in the post-war world in a place like Finland, some people identified with Mormonism because it met a sense of spiritual need among a rapidly developing middle-class society. The Lutheran church and the Orthodox church were both state religions and over time were often associated with the conservative aristocratic class. Many Finns were turned off by Lutheranism and religion more generally, thinking, religion was something like Karl Marx said, a form of oppression of the masses.

Q: Yeah, and they had to pay for it.

CLEVERLEY: And they had to pay for it.

Q: And what had it done for them?

CLEVERLEY: So, they liked the idea of a religion that had a lay priesthood. We all were our own leaders and took care of ourselves on a volunteer basis, not perpetuating any type of class structure. Most people were moving from an agrarian society into a modern service-oriented society. The idea of a middle-class type of religion wasn't something that you put aside. It obviously was not for everybody, but there were many people who liked that.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: The communists were the other side of that. During those years, as Americans we were immediately suspect.

Q: Correct.

CLEVERLEY: Communists we met at the door or anywhere else often thought we were spies. They would slam the door as hard as they could and call us American spies.

Q: Yeah, no, it resonated, and it was a good fit. Did you spend any time with and have any interesting relationships, encounters with the younger generation of communist ideologues or followers of communism in Finland? Where they university people for the most part?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I'll talk a little bit more about that later. But I had a lot of interaction with young people because one of the things we did in order to meet people was to set up free English classes once a week. Mainly college-aged kids joined us because they could come and speak English with native speakers. I got to know a lot of them. But they obviously were not the leftists. Later, when I was at the University of Helsinki, I got to know a lot of young leftists.

Q: Now, did you go to the University of Helsinki after you completed your mission years or in conjunction with it? How did that occur?

CLEVERLEY: I came a few years later after I was married.

Q: Is that how you met your wife? I understand she is Finnish.

CLEVERLEY: I met Seija in February 1967 during my first missionary assignment in Helsinki. She, too, was a missionary. I didn't yet speak much Finnish. My companion was one of the local missionary leaders. All of us did weekly reports, and he gave me an assignment to collect the reports from the other missionaries each week at church. Seija also was a new missionary, but one who was born in Finland, raised in Finland, and lived in Finland. One Sunday I asked for her weekly report. It was a major thing for me to

figure out how to say in Finnish, “Can I get your weekly report.” She hadn't met me before, looked at me, and started speaking quickly as if I understood what she was saying. I stood there quietly, understanding hardly a word. She finally said, here's my report and walked off. She told me years later that after our first meeting she mentioned to her companion that I was the most arrogant American she'd met. I wouldn't respond to anything she said and just stood there. In retrospect, I must have been somewhat intimidated. She was small, lively, spoke fast, and had a lot to say. I was not expecting that. All that Finnish just flew by me.

That's how I first met Seija. She and her family were originally from Vyborg, or Viipuri as the Finns call it, a Finnish city on the gulf near what was then Leningrad. Before the war, it was Finland's second largest city, its most cosmopolitan city. It was one of the cities on the Baltic where there was a lot of Hanseatic trade.

After the start of WWII, Finland's first war with the Soviet Union was the Winter War that went on for about a hundred days. When it came to a close, the Russians had taken terrible casualties, perhaps a million casualties Khrushchev said. As part of the peace treaty Finland ceded much of Karelia including Viipuri to Russia. The Soviet Union wanted a security barrier for Leningrad. In response to the border change, Seija's young family (though she had not yet been born) moved from *Viipuri* to western Finland.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: Fifteen months later, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. Hitler expected to reach Moscow quickly. Before the attack, the Germans approached the Finns to seek their participation. The Finns wanted back their lost territory, the traditional home to about twenty percent of their population, and joined the German attack, not as an ally but as a co-belligerent. Their objective was simply to regain their land. When Finland attacked on the Karelian front, in 1941, Seija's father was called up and sent to the front again. Initially, the Russians were more than preoccupied with Hitler, and Finnish troops quickly took back the lost Karelian lands. Many of the families who had lived there moved back to their old homes, including Seija's family and grandparents.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: Seija was born during that time, when her family had returned to their Viipuri home. Her father was off in the fighting, of course, and during the Red Army's last massive attack, in the summer of 1944, he was lost in action. Seija's mother was told that he was killed. They also had to evacuate once again back to Finland amidst ongoing Soviet attacks.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: They lost their house a second time, and this was the final time. Seija, then two years old, was a refugee with her mother and grandparents. Meanwhile, her

father was not dead but had been taken prisoner and was barely existing in a Russian prison camp. At some point, in late 1944, an agreement brought these Finnish prisoners home. When he crossed the border into Finland, he didn't know what had happened to his family, and they didn't know what had happened to him.

Decades later, after his death, we came across some of the letters and postcards he sent while still in a rehabilitation camp. He didn't have money and or even paper to write on. A Lutheran priest had given him the small cards he posted to everyone he could think of in order to locate his family. "Where are you?" he wrote to his father-in-law. "Are you alive, is my wife alive? Is Seija alive?" It was quite moving to feel his anguish. He finally made contact and returned to them. Over the following months, he began to put on weight, regained his health, and was working day and night to help pay post-war reparations to the Soviets.

Seija grew up in their new hometown, a small city called Lahti, that had about a hundred thousand people. In spite of everything that had happened, she had a very happy childhood there with her family. Her parents and grandparents got back to their feet financially and eventually were able to buy their own home.

At some point, Seija also converted to Mormonism and several years later she embarked on an LDS mission. The day when I first met her, she had just a week or two before arrived as a missionary. We were both soon transferred to different parts of Finland, but about a year later our paths again crossed in Helsinki. This time I could speak Finnish and understand what she said to me. She must have decided I might not be as arrogant as she originally thought. We got to know each other over the months. About the time my missionary period was ending, the church decided to start language schools where all missionaries could learn their language before leaving for the field. The location of the school where Finnish would be taught was Ricks College, a two-year college in Rexburg, Idaho, about twenty miles from Idaho Falls.

The people putting the program together wrote to our mission president asking him to identify a native speaker and an American ex-missionary who had learned Finnish well and who might be willing to come to Ricks to teach Finnish to the missionaries. There were very few in Rexburg who spoke the language. The school would give them a tuition scholarship to study at Ricks as an incentive. He turned to Seija and to me to offer us these positions. I really wasn't very excited about going to Ricks because I had been to BYU earlier, and I didn't want to go to a two-year college at this point. But Seija had already caught my eye, and this opportunity opened a door for us to get much better acquainted.

Q: This might be a good way to do it.

CLEVERLEY: So, we both ended up there in Ricks College for a year as the initial teachers.

Q: What year was that? Do you remember?

CLEVERLEY: It was 1969-1970. So, that's how we met, and how we got acquainted.

Q: This is Stephanie Kinney, taking the oral history of Michael Cleverley, February 21, 2022. Mike, when we finished our last interview, we were in about 1969. You had gone on Mormon mission for two and a half years to Finland. You had learned Finnish. You had met the woman who would become your wife, and the two of you had been invited—she as the native speaker, you as the American who speaks Finnish—had been invited to return to the States to join the faculty at Ricks College. A new language program for the Mormon church that would, among other things, teach Finnish. So, let's pick up from there if I've got that right, please correct me if not. Tell us about your departure from Helsinki and your arrival back in the United States. Is Ricks, R-I-X or R-I-C-K?

CLEVERLEY: R-I-C-K-S

Rexburg, Idaho February 1969-May 1970

Q: Where is it located?

CLEVERLEY: It's in a town called Rexburg, Idaho, north of Idaho Falls on the road to Yellowstone Park. It is in what they call in Italy the Prealps, the foothills as you rise from the 5,000-foot valley into the mountains.

Q: Aha, and is it a Mormon institution or was the program simply located at Ricks? It was a private college?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it was a private college owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Today, it is known as Brigham Young University-Idaho, or BYU-Idaho.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: Ricks was an old college by American West standards. It was founded in 1888 when Mormon immigrants moved into the area. The Mormons always valued education. So, they created this small college in the upper Snake River Valley as the first settlers filed their homesteads. Initially, it was like a high school, but then it graduated into a college structure. My grandmother, for example, was a student there. My mother was a student there, as was our son Mika, as well. The people who lived in southern Idaho took advantage of it as a school and a center of culture and sports. It wasn't very large but was connected to a larger LDS university system which included Brigham Young University in Provo, and Brigham Young University Hawaii located in Oahu. There were three colleges, and then in Salt Lake City, the LDS Business College.

This network of colleges was set up in the 19th century to help local people improve themselves. It was like in England, if you recall the self-help movement in the 19th century. And that's what it was for these people, too, who almost all, probably ninety-five percent of them, were farmers. They weren't farmers because they weren't educated or sophisticated, they were farmers because that's what people did on the late American frontier.

After arriving in Rexburg from Finland, Seija and I worked closely together. We arrived about two weeks after the language school's first missionaries had started their two-month language course. There was a lot of work to do. In addition to teaching, we both spent much time compiling new lesson material. She was a native speaker in the language school, and I was the ex-missionary who had learned Finnish from scratch. It was a smart idea because with a complex language like Finnish, learning the grammar is a big process for a non-Finnish speaker. Someone who's learned it can often explain it more easily than a native speaker who picked it up as a child. The native speaker, on the other hand, has their own advantages, speaking with a proper accent, and constructing sentences idiomatically like Finns on the street talk to each other.

The Complex Language Finnish

Q: Did you find, as many people do, that learning particularly, a complex language and a very different language from the Romance languages which have a more of a Western European, Roman and Latin base—but even learning Spanish in the 1960s, for example, meant seeing the world through a different cultural prism. A prism that divided time in a different way—that approached how you describe things and how you divide things by gender in a very different way, so that learning the language was learning to look and think through a very different cultural lens. Did you find that true? And was that one way you could be very helpful for Americans in teaching Finnish?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, this certainly was true. And it's always been true with my Finnish because when you use a language, there's a thought process behind the language. That thought process is conditioned by the language, but it's also conditioned by your background. So, you say something in a certain way which expresses your thought. Because Finnish wasn't Indo-European, their thought processes and linguistic expressions are really quite different in the way they are structured than ours.

When I studied Italian later, I found that it was a lot easier in that regard because quite often I would express things in English like an Italian would express them in Italian. And when I later studied Greek, my Greek teacher kept saying, "Don't make it difficult, just say it just like it flows." When I started just letting it flow, it sounded more like Greek.

Q: Correct.

CLEVERLEY: But with Finnish, that was definitely what you just described. And I'll give you an example. One time, many years later, I was on a lake in Finland, in a rowboat by myself, fishing. A Finn came along in his rowboat, fishing. As he got closer, I yelled

out to him, “Have you had any luck?” He looked at me strangely. What I had said was in perfect Finnish. The words were correct. The grammar was correct. It was just perfect Finnish. And he looked at me like, “Who *is* that?” He didn’t even speak to me. I really wasn't anyone he expected to find fishing on his lake. I suppose no Finn would ever say, “Have you had any luck?” when they’re fishing. They would say something like, “Did any fish come?” That's how they would express the idea.

Q: In fact, you had translated from English into Finnish as opposed to thinking and speaking like a Finn.

CLEVERLEY: I had said “Did you have any luck,” a thousand times growing up. I grew up fishing. If we saw somebody fishing on the same river and wanted to know what’s happening, that’s what we said. Finns would never say that. And that's true even today with my Finnish which is quite fluent. It's an issue that I can never get away from, the fact that I'm a foreigner, no matter how well I speak. Sometimes, it’s not so obvious, but if it's a regular conversation, at some point it's very clear. As a missionary, I got to speak Finnish quite well, but I remember children when I spoke to them saying, “Are you from Sweden?” Only a foreigner would say something like that.

Q: Right. Also, I don't know if you have experienced it with Finnish but certainly, the Castilian that one might have learned in the 1960s under the Franco regime has evolved so much that if that's your base, you probably had better speak less and listen more rather than jumping right in and assuming that your vocabulary—your use of formality versus informality, your use of the subjunctive—is proper. Life today in Spanish is much more positive and assumed than—if God wills that approach— that was very much embedded in the language of the '60s. Have you seen the same kind of evolution in Finnish?

CLEVERLEY: Slightly, but not as much as in other languages. I guess there probably are many reasons. Hegel said that as the nation starts to develop its own identity, there are certain elements that are important for achieving that identity. The Finns started moving towards a feeling of independence in the late 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th. They wanted to have a language, a culture, and a body of literature to strengthen a feeling of nationhood. The Finnish composer Sibelius very much was after that. He aimed to strengthen a Finnish identity by writing these wonderful pieces of music based on Finnish folk legends such as the Swan of Tuonela, and Finlandia. Finnish writers and poets did the same thing. The Finnish epic, the *Kalevala* rose in popularity to give Finns a literature and “history.”

Finnish wasn't even a written language until the early 19th century. Even under the Czars, the dominant professional and cultural language in Finland was Swedish. But as a Finnish identity developed, the Finnish language came in mode. I think Finnish to many Finns is almost a sacred thing, with sacred characteristics. It’s the definition of their Finnish identity.

In many languages there are many borrowed words, especially connected to new concepts. Let's say "computer" or something like that, which is a word that never existed before but has developed in our modern world. The word in Italian for computer is "computer." For Finns, when a new concept first comes out, often they will just put an "i" on the end because they have to decline or conjugate the word to use it in Finnish. That may last two or three years and then they will have their own native word.

So now, for "computer" their word is "*tietokone*," which means knowledge or information machine. That will surely match the idea of a computer. So, these borrowed words often have a very short life expectancy as they come into Finnish. And they will create a Finnish word, which sometimes includes two smaller words to get there. But they preserve it very well, the language—surprisingly well. If you know the word for knowledge, and you know the word for machine, it's "*kone*," and somebody uses the word "*tietokone*," you have a pretty good idea what they're talking about. So, at some point, as you learn this complex difficult language, the way they put their words together can actually be much simpler than they might be in some other languages.

Q: How did Seija feel about the prospect of leaving this very straightforward, concrete, known world that she had grown up in and lived in, about going to the United States?

Ricks College

CLEVERLEY: Well, that's a really good question. You know, at first glance, we were quite an unlikely pair. Here I was, from the West, from this world of a powerful American culture full of Americanisms, prejudices, ways of doing and thinking things, and all that we had in our minds during the 1950s and '60s, in the '70s in the United States. We had a very overly confident way of relating to everything around us.

She was from Finland, a country with a very different culture and history. She was used to living in towns. Idaho was still country, only eighty years from the frontier era. She had lived alongside the Russian border for all her life. The closest thing to Russia we knew was CBS evening news reports. Her family had lost their home twice. They were working class people who made sure she went to the best schools. She was an only child who only had one grandmother still alive. I had six siblings and grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, living all over the Snake River Valley. She recited poetry in national competitions and had been Finnish champion. We were just talking about this. Finnish poetry was a really big thing in Finland, a cultural pillar. Nobody I knew recited poetry.

So here she was, coming to Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho, which was about as wild as it was cold. As you travel through the rural towns and villages even today, many of them still have an air of developing frontier settlements. Yes, it was a big thing. Fortunately, we met a couple, Keith and Raija Nyborg, fairly early on who kept a living connection to all things Finnish. They had a ranch named the Finlandia ranch. It was on the border of Yellowstone Park. Raija was Finnish, and she was also Karelian, like Seija was, although they were a little older than us. As a great coincidence at a waystation along the great circles of life, President Reagan a decade later named Keith Ambassador to Finland when

we were then stationed at Embassy Helsinki. But we were friends before that. They attended our wedding. Life has its own circles that come back around again.

Q: And particularly in diplomatic circles. I think that something that a lot of people don't appreciate is that there is an international diplomatic order that is based on those relationships. Because people do move around and they re-encounter each other in unexpected ways.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. There was always quite a bit of that. So as I got to Ricks, my perspective on life had changed.

Q: Can you give us some examples? Tell us about that.

CLEVERLEY: Well, yes. The missionaries that I met in Finland were an intellectual lot. Because the church realized that the challenge of learning a very hard language like Finnish from scratch was going to be a big one, I think it tried to select people to go there who might succeed better. One of the thoughts the church must have had was that if you'd studied a hard language like Russian in high school, you were probably more likely to learn Finnish than if you hadn't studied anything at all. Probably about a third of the kids who were in my Russian class ended up going to Finland at some point as missionaries. There was another high school, in Salt Lake, that offered Russian. And many of those Russian students also ended up as missionaries in Finland. A lot of them were very smart.

When you work day-to-day, every day, with people who are quite precocious and curious about the world, that rubs off. It was a good developmental experience for me. Being in Finland had also opened my horizons. The country was seated firmly atop the East-West divide. During my missionary service, I had come to look at and see things from different perspectives. Seija, too, opened other perspectives with her story of where her family had come from. This very complex and interesting world around me had been a revelation for me.

Q: And yet you had become an international relations major at Brigham Young.

CLEVERLEY: I had, but that's classroom theory, you know, especially in the Central Rockies. I started this second year of college with a different feeling about international affairs. It was becoming a passion, whereas before, it was an interest. So, we ended up there at this very non-international college, except we were teaching Finnish. The decision to teach Finnish was part of a decision that the church had made for all languages. They put the Asian language programs at BYU Hawaii and the Nordics and Dutch at Ricks, probably because they thought people needed to learn how to live in a cold climate. So, we were there with the other Nordic languages and Dutch, and their teachers and native speakers.

Q: Where did they put the Romance languages?

CLEVERLEY: They were all in Provo, the Romance and Germanic, and all of the rest. At that time, BYU had about 25-30,000 students. It was a big campus. They had a lot of resources to focus on language. And the fact that a large share of the student body were also former missionaries who spoke and had learned a language just recently meant they had a lot of young people to draw on for instructors. The young men and women would come for two months of intensive language study from eight o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night. They were motivated and the programs were a success.

Q: Wow.

Language Training at Ricks and FSI

CLEVERLEY: It was interesting later in life to compare the experience in this language school program to FSI (Foreign Service Institute), where we were studying language mainly five hours a day for four to ten months, depending on the language. At Ricks, the course lasted two months but was much more intensive and effective. It was much more intense at Ricks, but you know, when you're nineteen or twenty, you tend to learn a language and everything else a lot faster than when you are thirty-nine or forty.

Q: Was it in your view, in fact, a more efficient methodology than, for example, the FSI approach?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it was much more efficient.

Q: Why?

CLEVERLEY: Well as evidence of that, the young people going through the program came out speaking Finnish better after two months than diplomats did after a forty-four-week course. And when they got to the country, they learned the language a lot faster than the diplomats did. There were a lot more hours per day, it was more intense, and there was a lot more motivation.

Q: A lot more purpose?

CLEVERLEY: A lot of purpose. I mean, they believed in this thing that they were doing.

Q: It wasn't just to pass a test. It was to really be able to speak the language.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it wasn't just passing the test. Maybe, I can talk about it more when we get into my experiences at FSI, but I think there were a lot of things built into the FSI approach that were not effective in teaching a language. Whether we might call these bureaucratic or political elements, overall the program was not as effective as it might have been.

Q: Yeah, we need to explore that later on because we're going through a period now of rethinking what does 21st century diplomacy, diplomatic service preparation and professional formation mean.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, definitely so. It's an interesting subject. I took FSI Italian and FSI Greek and have points of comparison.

Q: Were the students allowed to speak in English to each other? Or were the rules that, you know, not only were you in class with native speakers and bilingual navigators or helpers, but that you really were put into "total immersion" for the two months that they were there. How did that work?

CLEVERLEY: It was total immersion. In the classroom they were only supposed to speak Finnish to each other. But when they were outside the classroom, that wasn't necessarily the case. This was quite difficult because Finnish is like a wall initially, and when you hit that wall there's not a lot you can say for a long time. The grammar is so complex, and the vocabulary is, I would say ninety-five percent new. You can rarely draw on an English word to get to a Finnish word. You can quite often get from an English word to something like it in Swedish or Italian.

Q: Not very many cognates.

CLEVERLEY: No, and so we had to be a little flexible because in any language program there can be a level of depression, or you know, stress that can get overwhelming.

Q: Discouragement.

CLEVERLEY: Discouragement. I saw that at FSI too. Officers could get depressed from the pressure. It was like a pressure cooker, sometimes. So, we wanted to be a little flexible because in any language program, stress can get overwhelming. One of the things we did was to get off site. We piled onto a bus and went to Yellowstone Park, about 60 miles away. We had a vocabulary list that everybody studied, and we talked about what we were seeing. It was more fun and a lot easier than sitting in the classroom all the time.

Q: When did you say you got married, actually?

The Wedding

CLEVERLEY: Mormon missionaries have strict rules regarding fraternizing with the opposite sex during their proselytizing time, simply stated: "arm's length." It was thus not possible for Seija and me to get deeply involved during our time as missionaries. At Ricks after arriving from Finland, we got to know each other more deeply and intimately. Our stars aligned. We might have been an unlikely pair, but we were also soulmates who saw and felt most things in life in a similar way and complemented each other when we didn't. We arrived in Rexburg at the end of February and got married in Idaho Falls in June 1969.

Q: So, you were married in the United States.

CLEVERLEY: All weddings should be happy, and ours was, too. But it was also difficult for Seija because she was an only child. Her mother had developed a very serious arthritis condition about ten or fifteen years earlier and was in a wheelchair most of the time, not totally paralyzed, but struggling to move. It was impossible for her parents to come to see their only child get married. So, they had their own wedding party at their home in Lahti with their friends on the day we got married. I had only met her parents once, very briefly in passing when I was living in Finland. I didn't really know them, nor did they really know me.

In my studies at Ricks, I wanted to finish things expeditiously. I chose a major that interested me, one I thought I could complete quickly, history. I earned an associate degree in history in May 1970. We lived in a basement apartment. Seija was working about thirty hours a week and I, about twenty. We kept busy with our studies.

I hadn't met Seija's parents, and they hadn't met me. I was also mindful of the special place she held in their lives. They had sacrificed for their only child since she was born. We considered the possibility of going to Finland. We started saving every nickel and dime for travel to Finland for a year immediately after graduation.

Before I left Finland, I had talked to an American friend who was studying at the University of Helsinki. He said that there were not a lot of international students at the university, and they were anxious to diversify their student bodies by bringing in more foreigners. So, I corresponded with the university to express my interest in studying there for a year. I knew that I needed to remain a student. If I was accepted to a college, anywhere, I could maintain my student deferment from being drafted. I applied and was accepted. My tuition was eighty-nine Finnish marks a year, about twenty dollars, a real deal.

Helsinki Finland June 1970-June 1971

Q: You could manage that.

CLEVERLEY: So, we started planning our year in Finland. We also figured that we would have to get some type of work, or we would never get back to the United States. We both got jobs through a mutual friend who worked at Finland's second largest insurance company, in the head office. I worked in the marine insurance division, which was cargo and ship insurance. They needed a lot of English and were happy to have somebody who spoke native English and Finnish.

Q: Who was bilingual.

CLEVERLEY: I took care of correspondence, especially related to cargo insurance, claims and sales. Seija worked in the life insurance division. We worked, and I took classes in Finnish and one in English. I thought I spoke Finnish well, but when I got into a university classroom, that was different.

The first class I took was the history of Finland between the two World Wars, which was a fascinating time. But you know, I was probably the only foreigner in the entire classroom. The professor didn't even know he had a foreigner there. I met the professor again about a decade later when I worked at the embassy. He was astounded to hear I had taken a class from him. It took me a little while to build up my Finnish proficiency so I could understand the lectures as well as I wanted and to read the material.

Finnish Leftists in the Early 1970s

You asked earlier about the Leftists? At this time, Finland per capita had the largest communist party in Western Europe. Finland sought its independence from Russia in 1917 when Lenin led the communist revolution.

Q: In St. Petersburg, which was not that far away.

CLEVERLEY: St. Petersburg, which was very close. The Finns broke away and declared their independence, and Lenin accepted and recognized it. But Lenin had a large leftist following in Finland at the time, and Lenin's expectations—and probably the expectations of this group of Finns on the Left—was that Finland would become a communist country like he was creating in Russia. The same Red-White type of conflict developed in Finland as happened in Russia.

The Whites were a majority. They also had some German support. The communists, or Reds, were greatly peasants from the countryside. Many Whites were from the old Swedish-speaking aristocracy within Finland. A Finnish general in the Czar's World War I army, Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, came back from the front when the civil war erupted in Russia and Finland to lead the Whites. Mannerheim, from an aristocratic Swedish-speaking family, would play an important role in Finland for many years. So, the Whites were better led with a professional officer running the war operation. Another thing that mattered was that the leftist group split very early on into communist and social democrat factions. The Social Democrats were essentially Fabian socialists who believed in evolution as opposed to revolution.

The church was also part of the aristocracy. The communists and clergy opposed each other. Many communists were atheists, although not all. But they were anti-church, anti-clerical, and anti-Lutheran. Ninety to ninety-five percent of Finns were Lutherans. When the communists heard the word church, they thought Lutheran.

As it turned out, the Whites won in Finland, Finland's independence held, and the Finns created a democracy in a Western-oriented country. But any civil war is a vicious thing with atrocities on both sides, and it ended with lingering feelings of hate and betrayal. Many of the communist rebels had to flee. Some went to Russia and some even to Minnesota and Michigan where the American Communist Party was indebted to many Finns in the Great Lakes area. Gus Hall, who was the head of the American Communist Party when I was growing up, was a Finn. His parents were both Finnish immigrants who had changed the family name from Halberg to Hall. The residue was that many people remembered the Civil War with thoughts that their grandfather had been put before a

firing squad during or after the civil war, and that affected what was going on politically still in the early 70s.

Q: He was a Finn. Interesting.

CLEVERLEY: Anyway, the residue of any type of conflict like this is that a lot of people remember it with bitterness.

Q: Did you develop an insight or an understanding of why the Whites won in Finland?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, they were a majority, and were better led. They also had some German support.

Q: Were they land-based or urban?

CLEVERLEY: The communists, or Reds, were greatly from the countryside, peasants.

Q: Interesting. Church, yeah. Anti-clerical.

CLEVERLEY: In 1970 when I arrived at the University of Helsinki, there was a leftist movement everywhere in the world, including in the United States, but leftism among Finnish young people was strong and visible. It was interesting to see. When I went to class, I could tell whether someone was a leftist or a non-leftist—bourgeois, the leftists called them—by the way they dressed. They wore a khaki, you know, style of clothing, and the non-leftists wore bowties.

Q: Fashion wars.

CLEVERLEY: And there were old traditions, like when the professor walked in the room, everybody stood up. But not all of the leftists liked to stand up because that was recognition of a tradition they didn't necessarily accept. They accepted universities, but not all that came with them.

Q: Yeah, interesting.

CLEVERLEY: For me as an American, I found it interesting to be an observer of Right-Left dynamics. It was easy to get into a debate. The Left was fairly powerful, and probably the majority of students were Social Democrats and would be on the far left of today's Social Democratic party. At the time, I thought they believed in their ideology. I think—and I'll mention this more when we talk about later assignments—that so much of the leftist litany and ritual in those days was not really that well-believed, or at least it wasn't that big of a passion. It was youth and there was a lot of opportunism in the process.

Q: I'm thinking of the old saw, "He who is not a communist in his youth has no heart and who is not a conservative in his maturity has no head."

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that was definitely true. And we see that so much in polarized America today. There's a lot of self-righteousness: "If you don't believe like I do you're not smart. But I'm smart because I believe the right way." The leftists were that much in the extreme that it was hard arguing because by opposing a view that they accepted as common as "everybody should know that," you're defining yourself as somebody who's kind of ignorant.

Q: Right. Right.

CLEVERLEY: It was especially important in the process of broadening my background and sense of cultural and political differences, as well as seeing the role Marxism was playing in Europe at that time. I mentioned that the Finnish Communist Party was the first Eurocommunist Party. They often cooperated with government and were no longer revolutionary like they had been during the Civil War. They sometimes held portfolios, though they maintained their steadfast position on the far-left side of the spectrum. And of course, they were sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

Eurocommunists

Q: Yeah, help explain about Eurocommunism a little bit there for people reading this later who probably don't know the term or have forgotten that, because it was very broadly understood at least in international and diplomatic circles for the era that you're talking about. Explain what that meant, to be Eurocommunist and why being the first Eurocommunist Party was important and how that distinguished itself from Soviet communism or distinguishes itself from Soviet communism or strict alignment with the Soviet Union.

CLEVERLEY: Eurocommunists were Western European communist parties who rather than directly trying to subvert plural democracies, chose to work inside the system often cooperating in the government. Some background: As World War II ended and Soviet influence spread across Eastern Europe, the tragedy of the war left its impact on a lot of people, particularly on the Left in Western Europe. During the war, those who were communists were targeted by the Germans, and they, in turn, had bonded together to fight the Germans.

Q: Which was fascism.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, Nazism was fascism, the Left's old enemy. Many of the resistance movements in France and in Italy were greatly communists—not all but many of them.

Q: Yes, yes, because those are the two polar opposites—fascism and communism, at that time, ideologically.

CLEVERLEY: After the war, these parties started mobilizing themselves, and it occurred to many in Finland, for example, that there was not going to be a revolution. If you

wanted to really influence the political outcomes as a communist, the way was in cooperating with the other parties and moving policies toward leftist objectives. And such communist parties, as they evolved over the '50s, came to be called Eurocommunists. They existed in Western Europe and were Marxists who believed in cooperation and evolution much as the social democrats wanted, but usually from a position well left of the social democrats.

Q: And they also believed in culture and the control of culture and communication to influence people. Gramsci, rather than Lenin, was their God.

CLEVERLEY: In Finland and some other countries, you would have members of the Communist Party after an election assuming a position in national governments, if a coalition was necessary to achieve a majority, or in local governments. That the communists were willing to cooperate with non-communists gave them an air of credibility to non-communist parties. During the Cold War, it was a conundrum for Americans—how do you relate to a communist member of a legitimate government? Maybe it will be useful to talk about this in more detail when we discuss later assignments. Anyway, that's who they were, and it was a fascinating and developmental time for me.

Provo, Utah 1971-1975

Student Poverty

After a year in Finland, we had saved enough money to get home, and we returned to the United States. I applied to BYU where I'd had my freshman year and was readmitted. Seija had become pregnant while we were in Finland and was very big when we reached Provo. Her Finnish doctor said, "I think you're expecting twins." But we didn't have ultrasounds to determine whether that was true. When we got to the United States, her American doctor said he doubted she was expecting twins and that she was simply putting on too much weight.

We flew to Seattle via a stop in Washington, D.C. where we stayed with a friend of ours, also an ex-Finnish missionary. He was from Washington, D.C. and worked for the federal government. He was proud of his hometown and drove us around Washington. It was the first time either of us had been there—our first view of the magnificent city that would become home for most of our later lives. We were overwhelmed by the monuments, stately atmosphere, and beautiful green space. However, we learned an important lesson, too. While driving in the District of Columbia and passing by the capitol, our friend switched lanes probably too close to a car behind us. A car full of African Americans zipped up to our side and someone yelled, "Get your white asses back to Virginia," referring to our car's Virginia tags. Racial tensions were still high after the riots of the previous few years, our friend explained, and ill feelings were still in the air. The social and political complexity of our eventual home were clear to us from that day. I realized that with the limited background I had as far as racial interactions were concerned, there was much to learn.

When we finally got to Provo, we had thirty-five dollars in our pockets. We were about as poor as you can be, with Seija expecting, maybe twins. We rented a small old house from people who were friends of a friend. The older couple kindly said, “We know you don't have any money, and you can stay in the old house as long as you want. Don't worry about the rent for the first month. As soon as you get a job you can pay up the rent.”

I looked for work, got a job in a small supermarket, and started my studies at BYU. One day I showed up at the admissions office to apply for a scholarship. They told me that most of the scholarships were already gone. I argued with them until they finally agreed to give me a scholarship to help with tuition for the first semester.

Meanwhile, Seija, who was very small, five foot two, had become very big. When simply walking across the street, she once stumbled and fell because she couldn't really balance. On the day she went to the hospital, the doctor was worried that she couldn't get the baby through her pelvis and ordered an x-ray. After getting the results, he said to her, “Let's talk about these guys.” It was a shock, and Seija exclaimed, “Guys? what do you mean by guys?” He said, “The twins,” and she started crying, “What am I going to do with twins??” She had no siblings, and one baby seemed plenty enough. He smiled, and said, “Keep them.”

Q: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Oh, my daughter went through the same experience, both boys as well. She was an only child.

CLERVERLEY: So, you understand.

Q: I understand completely.

CLEVERLEY: She just lay there and smiled, “So, what do you think? That's what we will do, keep them.” When she came home, she had two babies. And we had no money. The people in the neighborhood all heard that this poor student family down the street had had twins. Starting on the first day the children were home, there was almost a parade of people coming to our door, bringing things, used and new baby clothes and other things we needed. We hardly knew any of them. Within a week, we had everything we needed for the twins.

Q: Oh, how wonderful the importance of community.

CLEVERLEY: That was community, a very American thing.

Q: Neighbors.

CLEVERLEY: You do it for your family, but for people you don't know? So, it was a very positive thing for her. I was in a different position now in my university studies because as a father of two and working I realized that I needed to finish up the bachelor's degree as quickly as I could. I had already done the required coursework in history, and I

had studied history at the University of Helsinki. So, I took history as my major and plotted how to get through everything. I was working, two jobs at a time, once three, trying to keep a straight A average. It was hard for both of us. We decided Seija would take on the family and home without much of the help from her husband that she needed and deserved. I would worry about earning money and succeeding in school.

Seija, with two kids, wasn't in any position to take work and instead started a home bakery. She would get up at four o'clock or five o'clock in the morning to bake hot Finnish cinnamon rolls, Finnish sweet bread, and other things. Word got around quickly among students, you know how good they were. I delivered them on my way to class. She earned enough money to buy milk, baby food, and things like that with her home bakery. We were scraping the barrel clean: there was really not very much from one day to the next.

Q: And that was in 1972.

CLEVERLEY: I graduated in August 1972. Along the way, one of my professors noticed my passion for history. He called me up after class one day and said, "How would you like an assistantship, an undergraduate assistantship in a new center for western American history?" I didn't know very much about western American history or the West because my classes had mostly been European history. He offered me a job working as a research assistantship that paid immensely better than the supermarket. I did both jobs and from that point forward, I continued to earn enough for us to get by. It was a perfect job because I liked history. I wrote a chapter on urban development in Utah during the 19th century that became part of a college textbook on Utah history, the standard textbook for the next twenty years.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: When I graduated in history, I thought about doing a PhD and an academic career. I discussed this with my major professor, and he enlightened me: "You know, to get a decent teaching position in history these days, you will need to have a PhD from one of the ten best universities in the United States. Even if you get one, your chances of getting a teaching position are low because they're just not hiring. So, if you want to do this, that's fine, but I want to be honest with you. That's what you're going to face." Teach, what do you do with a PhD in history if you don't teach? It probably would not lead to anything else either. I thought this through and realized for me, history had been such a great education with so many benefits. But it was not too much of a profession most of the time.

Q: Well, and it was a period when our narrative was very set and it was very competitive and taken for granted. And, you know, you would find something very different today, probably.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I would think so. I had taken some undergraduate classes in economics, and I knew it was also something I enjoyed. BYU then had a terminal

master's program in economics. I began to consider changing my graduate major to earn a master's degree in economics. The program was rigorous enough to give a good prospect of getting into one of the top ten economic graduate schools. But acceptance to the program was conditioned on my finishing all the major requirements for a bachelor's degree, and I needed some economics classes and a ton of math and statistics to get there. The BYU program was affiliated with the University of Chicago—very quantitative. I started in economics, and I continued with my assistantships in history but soon had both teaching and research assistantships in economics.

Q: Did you enjoy teaching?

CLEVERLEY: Yes. I liked the discussion. I liked to provoke students. I thought that in a very conservative institutionalized BYU, people could easily be provoked by throwing out ideas that they hadn't thought about before. It energized them to think and was a good teaching tool. The more emotional someone got in their arguments, the more they had to think about it, and the fight was worth the price. It was easy for me, a history major, to challenge the dogma of economic theories. When the students evaluated my class, I was very high on the percentile list, but there was always a residual that disliked the class. I was doing this from a completely different background. In history, you throw something up in the air, and you talk about it and play with it and discuss it.

Q: Look at it from all angles.

CLEVERLEY: In economics, it's very doctrinaire.

Q: Well, especially in those days, in the University of Chicago economics terms.

CLEVERLEY: Exactly. So, for somebody who was used to never thinking about things but just accepting it as doctrine, saying, "Well, is that really the case? And we really believe that, why?" That was something they hadn't done in other economics classes.

Q: Heterodoxy.

CLEVERLEY: I liked the conservative approach in economics because I thought markets were important. I liked the emphasis put on markets and letting market actors work. But I didn't think the world began and ended on that concept. I thought economics was as much a way of thinking as a discipline. This was important for me, especially in many of my later jobs as a foreign service officer. At heart, though, I remained a social sciences person. After two years, in 1974, I graduated with an MS in economics.

A Visit to Cold War Leningrad

Let me diverge for just a minute—I was now married to a Finn, and we had two children. A year after the twins were born, we had a third child, a son we named Mikael and called Mika. Since Seija's parents didn't have any other children or grandchildren, we knew how badly they wanted to see us. We thought we would take some of our meager earnings and school loans to make a trip to Finland during the summer of 1973.

We packed our kids up in our little car, drove to San Francisco, and caught a direct flight to Helsinki. We spent a month in Finland, and Seija's parents got to know their grandchildren and vice versa for the first time. One morning, I was reading the local newspaper and saw advertised a trip to Leningrad. It was a group trip by bus with a group of Finns, but anyone could sign up, pay the price (actually quite little), and join them. I thought this sounded interesting. Seija didn't think that she could leave the three children, but suggested I ask my father-in-law, Manne, if he would like to go with me. Manne came back with a very emphatic, "No." He had been a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union at the end of World War II for many months, and he said, "I was marched through Leningrad once, people spitting on us." He added, "I said then, and I say now, that I will never go back, ever."

Q: Never go back, wow.

CLEVERLEY: But Seija and her mother both thought that it might be a good idea for him to go back, to have a chance to—

Q: Kind of closure.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, closure and also a chance perhaps to see their old home in Viipuri along the way. He was getting it from both women and finally gave in. We signed up. It was only three days. I was the only American and the only foreigner on this bus. One of the reasons the Finns liked to go to Leningrad is they could stock up on cheap vodka.

Q: And cheap women.

CLEVERLEY: They were a little bit careful about that—it often came with some strings attached. Vodka was okay. So, Manne and I went by bus to Leningrad. It was closure for him, really. While driving through the countryside, we passed over the present border into what was once Finland and where he fought. He showed me ruins of the bunkers, not yet totally hidden in the woods, and he pointed to the place he was captured during the Russian onslaught in June of '44. Manne chuckled as he talked, and it was becoming fun for him to talk about the distant past. But the atmosphere was heavy—it was oppressive, repressive, how would you say it? As soon as we got across that border, we felt it was like we were coming to—

Q: Yeah, it was like going from Checkpoint Charlie to the East in Germany. It was all of a sudden, you knew you were in a different planet.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, that's right, and I once did that, it was the same thing. Our tour was organized by the Finnish-Soviet Union Society. The organizers' idea, of course, was to introduce Russia on friendly terms to as many Finns as they could. The cultural kind of things. I didn't notice any of these Finnish tourists were communists. One of the things we did was to drive through the city of Viipuri, where Manne's family had lived. It was a chance for the Finns to see the old city, which even then—this was 1973, almost thirty

years after the war—still looked bombed out. The Russians had done very little to put it back together. Soldiers stood on street corners with submachine guns with all of the signs of a military state. And the KGB [*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*] were visible, even to me who had never had first-hand experience with such things. Everywhere we went, there was the same overweight guy following us.

Q: You knew who he was interested in.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, he was following me. Our Finnish bus driver was outspoken and talked negative things about Russia. One night in Leningrad, he woke up to find a guy in his room going through his things.

Q: Oh, Lord.

CLEVERLEY: On the return, we were driving through Viipuri, and Manne walked up to the bus driver to ask, “Can we make a detour to see my old home?” It was only two blocks off the main road. The communist Finn and Russian guide in charge of our group both said emphatically, no diversion from the highway. As we got to the point where we needed to turn off, the bus driver said, “Why not?” So, we just drove over and stopped in front of Seija’s parents’ old house. Manne jumped off the bus and took pictures. The people working in the yard started raising their fists and yelled something. They knew the passengers were a bunch of Finns, probably originally from Karelia. The Finnish guide went on the microphone: “You know, Russians are very friendly people, and they’re all sending their greetings.” Everyone had a great laugh.

Q: Lying through their teeth. It was a good context I suspect for the era in which you were going to end up in the Foreign Service.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it was. It again pricked my interest in doing something like this. After our three weeks in Finland, we came back to Provo, started classes, continued raising three children, and survived. As I finished up my master's degree in economics, the department asked if I would be willing to take a one-year faculty appointment as an instructor of economics. It would only be one year. We were not paid all of the money in the world, but for us, it was a lot. I spent the next year teaching classes in intermediate theory to business majors.

Washington, D.C. May 1975-July 1976

Q: And, what happened next?

CLEVERLEY: As I approached the end of my faculty year at BYU, I started looking for a job. This was a time when economics was becoming much more mainstream in the federal government, both in the State Department and Civil Service. Post-war economics were changing for the United States, and economics was of new importance.

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

That winter, I had passed the Foreign Service written examination, and my oral examination was scheduled in Washington in February or March 1975. I told the same friend who had taken us around Washington a few years before that I would be flying to Washington for the oral interview. He was still working for FAS [Foreign Agricultural Service] and offered to get me a job interview there, too. I don't recall how I did it, but I also made connections with other agencies in Washington and had at least four interviews during that trip to Washington. When I got back, I ended up getting three offers, and I took the one with the Foreign Agricultural Service. I was from a semi-rural background and dealing with agricultural products seemed familiar. I had also passed the State Department's oral examination and moved into the later stages of State's hiring process.

Q: Yeah, and free trade was emerging. That was really the part of economics that was becoming ever more salient in Washington, because the big advantage for the United States was free trade.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, exactly. In agricultural products in particular.

Q: Agriculture was what we had plenty of.

CLEVERLEY: My first position at FAS was as an analyst in the grain and feed analytical division. I qualified as an economist and as an agricultural economist. I was on a foreign service track and scheduled to later go abroad as an agricultural attaché. I played with numbers, trying to project food surpluses and shortfalls and especially where prices were going. This was a time when the USSR was having huge shortfalls with its grain crops. What was happening in Russia, affected grain prices and bread prices, and this spilled over into the United States. USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] had the best estimates of the world's supply and disappearance, so there was a lot of interest in what we were doing. I was talking one day to the Wall Street Journal and the next with other financial papers, all calling to find out what was happening.

Q: Yeah. But your appointment—the members of FAS at that time were seated in the State Department or at DOA, at the Department of Agriculture?

CLEVERLEY: FAS was part of USDA. FAS had been created out of the State Department about ten years before, so there were still some people working in FAS who had been in the State Department originally. I met some of them. I was sitting in USDA on 12th Street.

Q: In USDA, okay, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: I was earmarked to go out as an assistant agricultural attaché to Rome within a year or two. The thought sounded exotic to us then.

Q: And to Embassy Rome or to the FAO [United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization]?

CLEVERLEY: No, it was Embassy Rome—to work in the agricultural attaché’s office based in the Embassy. All of a sudden, we were in a much bigger world, a diverse and fascinating one.

Q: Where did you live? Did you live in the District or did you live in Virginia?

CLEVERLEY: We were able to save up a little bit of money during the year I was an instructor at BYU and wanted to buy a house. When we arrived in Washington, we found and bought a condominium apartment in Gaithersburg. For us, it was like paradise, with three bedrooms. We had three kids and three bedrooms. It was near Montgomery Village in a development named Village Overlook. I had the salary of a GS-9. It was not a lot of money, but more than I had earned before. But Washington was expensive. I had a twenty-five-mile commute down 270 into the District and then back at night. There was a lot of traffic.

The Foreign Service Exam

If you would like, I will step back a little bit to explain how I actually got into the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, I think that's important. We've got just another twenty minutes. So, let's take it up to maybe how you actually got in, including the exam process at that time. And then, we'll start with maybe A-100 and your first assignment next session. Does that make sense?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, sounds good. I mentioned to you earlier that as a freshman, I had a roommate who was hoping to get into the Foreign Service. It sounded like something that I thought I would like to do. And then the mission came along, I was in Finland, and we got married. When we went back to the University of Helsinki, I had a friend who was an American studying at the University of Helsinki. He told me he was going to take the Foreign Service exam, and that rang a bell.

Q: Yeah, I've heard of that.

CLEVERLEY: He was taking it at the embassy, and I signed up for the exam. I only had two years of college and didn't know what to expect from the exam. I knew it was challenging. I had only had two years of college but thought, “What’s to lose except a Saturday morning?”

Q: Yeah, exactly.

CLEVERLEY: We both passed the written examination. He never joined the Foreign Service because of some health issues, but for me it raised a question whether I really was interested in going into the Foreign Service before finishing college. I decided, probably not, but I wanted to continue the process to learn how it worked. When we returned that year from Finland to the United States, as I mentioned earlier, we traveled through Washington, D.C. where I took and failed the oral examination. I gained some

good experience in the process. I realized that if I got more serious about this in the future, these experiences could be beneficial.

Q: Yeah. Now, what did it mean to take the oral exam in those days?

CLEVERLEY: I sat in a room with three or four people, probably mid-level or senior officers. They threw out questions to see how I would answer. What I didn't understand at that point was that it didn't necessarily matter how you answered them. What mattered was the strength of my response. They started with some difficult things, "Tell me in detail the difference between the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and the IMF (International Monetary Fund).

Q: And what was GATT?

CLEVERLEY: The GATT was the international arrangement for trying to promote freer trade by lessening or removing trade barriers. I knew they were both international economic institutions, but I had not studied them in any detail and wasn't prepared for that question, that day. I thought if I don't have a lot to say about it, maybe I won't say very much. Of course, that didn't help. There was another question or two along the way, similar to that. And then they said, "You know, it was nice meeting you but..."

Q: Not now, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: When I left, I wasn't disappointed. The trip to Washington, alone, was worth every minute. We saw the city, and I went back to BYU to start the process of finishing an undergraduate degree. When in my senior year they announced that they were administering the Foreign Service examination on campus, I decided to try it again. I again passed the written examination and was set up for an oral interview in Denver. It was a similar set-up, but I did much better. I was ready to answer the question about the GATT, but they didn't ask it. They asked what was playing on Broadway. At that point in my life, I couldn't have cared less what was playing on Broadway.

Q: —playing on Broadway.

CLEVERLEY: I just had no idea what was playing on Broadway and that's what I said. Broadway then was so far beyond my points of reference, which were keeping up the grades, maintaining the history assistantship (and, incidentally, learning what was playing in Salt Lake theaters in the 1880s), and most of all getting milk on the table of my young family. That was not the right answer or the right way to answer it. So, I did pass, but it was a marginal pass.

Q: Just for people's information, how should you have answered it?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I thought about that afterwards—what was the right answer for the question? I was finishing a very intense and compact undergraduate degree with a wife and three children and two jobs, sometimes three. Perhaps, the best answer would have

been to approach it exactly that way, implying another day I'll know, but not now, for all these reasons.

Q: I didn't—I hadn't had the money to even consider the possibility of Broadway plays. I can't even afford the records.

CLEVERLEY: We hadn't even been to a movie in over two years.

Q: Yea, exactly—building empathy for your position.

CLEVERLEY: With a marginal pass we started the security clearance process and things like that. But they told me that they couldn't guarantee that I would get an appointment because I wasn't high enough on the list.

Q: The list. Explain the list.

CLEVERLEY: They rank ordered everybody who passed. If you were at the top of that rank order, you would get the first appointment, and then they worked down the list until they had filled up whatever quota they needed for that year. What also was hard for me when I thought about a State Department career was a scandal that had come out in the press. I had been reading about it in *Time* magazine. It turned me off on the State Department a lot. And before they got to that part of the process, I decided that the Foreign Service was not a place I would really like to work.

Q: And what was the scandal? Do you remember?

CLEVERLEY: I don't know if you recall but there was an officer whose efficiency evaluation had been mixed up with another officer's who had the same name.

Q: Charlie Thomas.

CLEVERLEY: Charlie Thomas, exactly, and it resulted in his suicide. And yeah, it was just a terrible situation.

Q: Well, to fill in the blank there. There were two Charlie Thomas's. The evaluations had been confused. And the problem was that, at that time, not only were wives included in the evaluation process, but officers were not allowed to see their evaluations. So, no one knew, including the officer, that his evaluation had been confused. Number one, he was selected out and the Charlie Thomas who should have been selected out—wasn't. The selected-out officer looked for a job for a year, two years, couldn't find it and eventually committed suicide. And it was a scandal. It changed the foreign service evaluation process completely.

CLEVERLEY: For the better, I think, by far, but it still was a sad thing.

Q: But it discouraged you from going further?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I really thought, you know, if that's the way the personnel system worked in a place like that, I probably wouldn't be happy there. So, I went into graduate study in economics. Later, as I was finishing up the instructor of economics job, I was getting more serious about finding a long-term career when I saw that again they were giving the Foreign Service exam on campus. I thought I'll start it over. I took the exam, passed it, and opted to go to Washington D.C. to do the oral. Whether it was true or not, some people who knew the process said I might have a more productive oral examination in Washington than on the road. I could also interview for other jobs there.

Again, I passed, and this time I was much higher on the rank order. It was never a promise when you're even in that position. You do your security clearance, and you do a physical, and whenever they get to you on the rank order, nobody can say. When I was offered the position at the Foreign Agricultural Service, I reasoned it was very similar to the State Department. I'd be doing diplomacy abroad. In embassies, I would be limited in what I would be doing in a substantive way. You will be doing an agricultural type job, whereas in the State Department, you could do a lot of different things. I decided let's see what happens. If they ever offered me a position in the State Department, I would make the decision then. I took the FAS appointment and started in May 1975.

In December of 1975, the State Department Bureau of Examiners called me to offer a position in a class that would start in January. Seija and I talked about it. State at least offered the possibility of going to Helsinki on a future assignment. FAS had no office there. This was an important consideration. Her parents were still alive, and we thought it would be nice if we could be closer to them. I also preferred the broader scope that the State Department promised. So, I put in my resignation and accepted Foreign Service offer.

Before I left, one of the senior people in FAS talked to me. He was a former foreign service officer. "You probably will never go to Helsinki, and I'm sure you will be sorry you left FAS. I came here and have been happy every day since," he said. I understood that was his experience. I wasn't sure it would be mine.

Q: So, you were—the invitation came in in '75. And you were invited to join the class in early January—that would start in January '76. Is that correct?

CLEVERLEY: We went back to Washington to work at FAS in May of '75. And in December of 1975, the Bureau of Examiners offered me an appointment for the class that began in January '76, the 123rd A-100 class.

Q: Yeah, it started in January '76. I came in September of that year, so similar timeframe and similar historic era. Well, I think we'll wrap up today's session there. We'll start with A-100, your transition from FAS to Department of State Foreign Service with our next interview, and your first assignment, what A-100 was like, and what your first move overseas was like.

Q: Today is Friday February 25th, 2022. This is Stephanie Kinney, doing an oral history interview with Mike Cleverley. We left off with after orals and passing the exam and orals, his acceptance into the Foreign Service. So, today, we'll start with the beginning of your diplomatic service career. It has been traditional for decades and decades and decades—the classes called A-100. It has changed very little over the years, except that it has gotten shorter, more bureaucratized and operational.

But, let's talk about your impressions, your feelings, your quandaries. As you moved from USDA, the United States Department of Agriculture, where you had been working in the Foreign Agricultural Service for a year—and now become a junior foreign service officer, as they were called in those days—now they're entering officers, because so many of them are so old. But in those days, you became a junior officer and your first task—after checking in as it were—was to become a member of the next Foreign Service class at A-100. What was the number of your class? How many people? How long did it last? What are your memories of it? The good parts, the bad parts, the curious parts, the mystifying elements? Tell us about that A-100 experience for you.

CLEVERLEY: Okay. Well, thank you Stephanie. I had one question, which I should ask before I go into this. And that is—I know, this becomes all part of the public record. Is there a policy regarding using names of colleagues and others that I discuss?

Q: No, that is purely up to you and at your discretion. You will receive a transcript in writing of our oral interviews. And, you will have the right of the author to edit that before it is ever made final or released to the Library of Congress. But these are on the record, memories, and you can be as frank and as honest or as discreet and ambiguous as you choose. History will judge you—only.

CLEVERLEY: All right. All right, that's good to know.

Q: No classified information unless it has been unclassified—obviously—because these are on the record, but we rarely have any issues even. And, as I say, if there is any question, you can, you have the discretion before it's ever published to edit as you see fit—because it's your oral history—for history.

Launching Diplomats: the A-100 Course

CLEVERLEY: Okay, great. Here I was on the threshold of a new career with the State Department. I looked at it as a career, something I hoped that I would do for the rest of my life. The Foreign Service was considered a career. I don't know if it is quite as much today as it was then, but new officers like I was, looked at it so.

As I stood there on the first day of the 123rd A-100 class, what I've been writing about – where I came from; what made me, me – that's who I was. I think back on my characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses as a new officer: I was proficient in a rare,

hard language. While I was working for FAS, I spent an afternoon at FSI taking a language aptitude test as part of their HR (Human Resource) program. I scored very high. I think that was essentially a result of having studied Finnish so intensively. Acquiring a difficult language like that was helpful in studying and learning any language. I had a graduate degree in economics, which was not too common among FSOs in those days. And, I had a lot of foreign experience having lived three and a half years abroad on the ground and attending university. I nourished an intense interest in foreign affairs, but was probably more an uncut gem, with so much to learn and refine.

What was gratifying for me as this career played out was how quickly over the next two or three assignments, the Foreign Service took advantage of what I had to offer. We sometimes love to criticize the State Department personnel system—and I have my own basket of criticisms—but the fact was, for me as a new officer, the State Department offered opportunities which allowed me to do the types of things I might be able to do. When I arrived there, the Foreign Service Institute's A-100 123rd class was in Rosslyn, across the river from the District of Columbia.

Q: It had not moved to its current venue on Arlington Boulevard. Much bigger campus, you were still in the old FSI Rosslyn campus?

CLEVERLEY: The Foreign Service Institute's A-100 class met in a high-rise, at least by Washington standards. The building was rented by or owned by the State Department. I don't know the arrangement. There were two or three similar State buildings in Rosslyn. We gathered that first day looking each other over. This was 1976: we had long mustaches and hair and crazy clothes. And, as they took mugshots of us for an eventual stud book—

Q: Do you want to explain the stud book?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. Well, it was called a stud book then, but this is probably not a politically correct word anymore. A bio book where each member of the class had a page that told a little about who they were with a picture of them at the top. The visuals revealed our generation and perhaps at least initially reflected to some extent our attitudes. It was published by FSI, it wasn't very long, and it wasn't very expensive to produce. It kind of gave us a character for the beginning of the beginnings.

Q: But that was a term of art or common to the culture at that time because most of the, almost all of the officers were male, number one. And it also referred to a larger compilation that included the entire Foreign Service. It was classified. And the big game by the Russians and others was to discern who was truly Foreign Service and who wasn't in it. But it was, it produced a short entry, not a page each with a picture but a short entry each, of exactly what you're describing in your A-100 booklet.

CLEVERLEY: Perhaps our class's book was somewhat different. It had pictures, and each individual had their own page.

Q: And what were the beginnings?

CLEVERLEY: There were probably about twenty-eight people in our class. Maybe a third of them were women. Perhaps there were four or five minorities. Most were males, white males. For me, the beginning did not entail really anything terribly different. In many ways, starting was not a whole lot different from what I was already doing, because I didn't have to travel to D.C. to take up this new job. I was already there. State's Foreign Service wasn't totally different from what I was already doing at the Foreign Agricultural Service.

The dynamic of the classroom was not a whole lot different from a university classroom, where I spent too many years. And I was already in federal employment. I had been in the civil service. The Foreign Service was different from that, with different rules and so on, but it was still federal service. So, for me, the change, or at least the magnitude of the change from where I was, into this new position in the State Department wasn't so dramatically different. It just felt like I left on Friday, I quit one position, and on Monday I was over in another part of town starting a new one.

But what was impressive to me was that here was a very capable group of officers who, like me, were excited about a new career. They had diverse, sophisticated backgrounds. And they were stimulating. We had a lot of time in the schedule where we could visit with each other. I think the class went for five weeks if I remember correctly. Everything was not "bang, bang, bang, bang," but we had topics that covered maybe a morning or maybe a morning and an afternoon. We had breaks for ten or fifteen minutes and lunch. We did have a chance to get to know each other and talk about things, interests, and so forth.

Q: It sounds like your time at USDA was an advantage to you. Did other people have a more difficult time? Or, have essentially a more difficult time getting into the class adjusting or not?

CLEVERLEY: I really didn't notice. I don't think it was that challenging that some people would be overwhelmed. Maybe they did, but it didn't show or maybe I just didn't notice. Certainly, it was a remarkable leap into something quite different, but perhaps for me, already working in a foreign service agency, not as much. There are a lot of things we needed to learn and understand and so forth.

Q: Such as?

CLEVERLEY: There were a lot of things we needed to learn and understand, such as State Department rules; reporting; how embassies were set up; what a career might look like as you got further into the Foreign Service. Ethics standards were not different from anywhere else in the executive branch for the most part, but instruction on ethics was certainly more essential. For example, when working in a civil service office somewhere in Washington, nobody's likely to offer you a gift unless something is wanted in return. But in the Foreign Service, lots of people offered small gifts without strings attached, not

as a bribe or anything like that. How did you properly handle such situations? So, I felt there was a different, more serious take on ethics in the State Department.

The first day at work in FAS, I reported for duty. We had nothing like A-100. So, we didn't discuss these things so much. The fact that the State Department did want to discuss them and wanted to make sure we were comfortable with a whole set of issues we might face was new. That was something I thought was valuable. Perhaps, the thing I remember most was an off-site in Harpers Ferry. I don't now remember exactly all we did there, but some of it was like gaming. I thought it was useful. In general, I thought a lot of the things going on outside of the classroom were as important as what was going on in the classrooms. We learned by talking about some of these things with our colleagues after the lectures.

Classes were in a discussion format. They would throw out information that we needed to understand or know or learn. Then we discussed it. I believe the senior-most person to speak to us was Larry Eagleburger, who was the under secretary for Management at the time.

Q: Wow. And he was a foreign service officer, so there was also a senior, junior—both value and mentoring as it were, in that sense.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. Sometimes they also tried to mix us up with more senior officers. For example, one day, we had a meeting at the Department, and instead of having us climb on a bus, they said, "We have some officers here who are going over to the State Department," and wanted two or three of us to climb in each car. The person whose car I was in was the director of the Foreign Service Institute. It gave us a chance to informally talk to him. I didn't find it very demanding, but it was insightful and stimulated thought about the future.

What was demanding for me at the time was taking place at home. We were living in Gaithersburg, and I commuted every day. My carpool would stop on the D.C. side of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and I would walk across to Rosslyn. That was great, at least when it was not frigid or blizzarding. I liked the fresh air and beauty of the river. But we had three children at home under four. Seija was expecting again. We didn't have a lot of money.

Q: Do you remember how much you earned?

CLEVERLEY: I came in as an FSO-7. My salary was \$11,850, if I remember correctly. It was something more than what it sounds like today, but not a lot more. Because we were already living in Washington when I entered, we didn't get the per diem that most of the others received. When I was at the FAS, I had taken the FSI Finnish language exam and got a 3+/3+. And because I had a 3+/3+ in a hard language, I received a four-step in grade pay increase. That got my starting salary close to \$15,000, still not an immense amount of money, but better than \$11,000. I was glad that FSI was not generally more demanding, like a job in an office might have been. I was able to get home on time, and

that was especially a time Seija needed me closer. I must confess, though, that I don't have a lot of memories of FSI or of the A-100 because I got pulled out early.

Q: Why was that?

CLEVERLEY: I was about halfway into the A-100 when my career counselor, the person working with me on career planning, told me that they had a job opening in Milan that required Italian language proficiency. It was a language designated position as an economic officer. If I was interested, it would require leaving A-100 early because the Italian class was starting immediately, and I needed to be there from the very beginning. I think three weeks was all I got of the A-100. I went right into an FSI Italian class in the same building but a different floor. That in a nutshell was my A-100 class. It is one of those parts of the Foreign Service that I don't recollect with the same degree of detail as most others.

Q: Yeah. Did you stay in touch with your A-100 class members?

CLEVERLEY: I didn't get as acquainted with my fellow A-100 members as might normally be true. One of them, Tom Miller, was later a close colleague. I served as his DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) during my second tour in Athens when he was ambassador. Another of my colleagues was David Wagner who had similar assignments to mine at the beginning of his career and who ended up in Moscow on his second assignment when I was on mine in Helsinki. When he had a chance to get out of Moscow, he came to Helsinki and sometimes stayed with us. As it turned out, and I'll tell that story maybe later, he ended up finding his wife at a party at our home in Helsinki. We are still close friends here in Washington. Bob Deutsch, another economic officer, also had assignments similar to mine at times. So, although I don't think I developed the same degree of connection with the other members of the class, I still kept up with some of them.

Q: Yeah. So, that junior officer cohort was important.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, but I wonder if it's even more important today. Like I mentioned perhaps earlier, we have a son who's in the Foreign Service. With his A-100 cohort, I noticed he was a lot closer to them than I was. It was a group of people he has kept track of over his career.

Q: Yeah. And they also have digital communication, that was not available back in your time.

CLEVERLEY: They do, email and messaging. It is a lot easier than it was for us. It was hard to even keep track of where people were then.

Q: Yeah. That's why you had the Foreign Service lounge.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that's where you met people that you hadn't seen for a long time. I don't know if they have it anymore, but I thought it was one of the best places in the building.

Q: Well, that was part of the diminishing of the Foreign Service in the State Department. The name was changed to employee service lounge or some such, I'm not quite sure. But the Foreign Service designation was abolished.

CLEVERLEY: It was so terribly convenient when you were in between assignments and going to meetings in the Department. Is there something more you think I should tell about the A-100?

Q: It's your story, so, it's what struck you and what you think is worth noting or not. If you don't have anything more on that, we might spend a little time on—I didn't know whether it would make sense to compare and contrast your language learning or your language acquisition experience at FSI versus your experience in Finland? Or at Ricks.

FSI Language Training – a Critique

CLEVERLEY: I could do that. When I took the FSI test for Finnish, as I said before, I was still at FAS, before coming to the State Department. But it was a State Department test, and I got a 3+/3+. And that was after having spoken it fluently, every day, all day long for two and a half years, teaching Finnish for a year, and going through a Finnish university experience where the level of the language was very high. I had lots of friends who always spoke with me in Finnish, to say nothing of my Finnish wife. But my tester gave me a 3+/3+.

Q: Which is almost fluent.

CLEVERLEY: Almost, but when the scale goes from zero to five—

Q: Five, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: The teacher who gave me the exam said she would have given me a higher rating, but I hadn't been in the Foreign Service, and I had not worked in an embassy. That surprised me because it seemed to me that objectively, either you speak it or you don't.

Q: Yeah, but it wasn't.

CLEVERLEY: She was saying, "Just how do I know if you speak on a professional level?" Well, that was the purpose of the test, to figure that out. That was her job.

Q: Yes, exactly.

CLEVERLEY: But it had nothing to do with what assignments I had had or would have. I thought that was one of the problematic assumptions that went into the FSI process and there were many of them.

Q: Yeah, there was a well-known, observed bias that you tested better, even if you spoke worse, if you learn the language from FSI as opposed to outside of FSI.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, there was that bias, and there was a self-serving bureaucracy. That's still probably the case, whether intentionally, or not. I don't say that though to suggest that the instructors, the director, or the people who run the program are not top-notch professionals. I had many wonderful teachers at FSI who were very, very good. I have the greatest respect for them. But I think it's a system that developed its own bureaucracy over the years, and any bureaucracy eventually becomes self-serving in the sense it has its own interests that it feels it must promote.

Q: Who were your language teachers? Were they Americans who had learned Italian or were they Italians who had come to America? Was it a combination? Tell us a little bit about who the instructors were, how you related to them and what your classes were like.

CLEVERLEY: Well, the instructors were all native speakers and most of the time the instruction was in Italian. That was good, I thought. They were generally locally hired in the Washington area, not necessarily teachers with training as teachers, or at least we could see no evidence of professional training. But they all spoke the language very well, and some of them were very bright and stimulated you. As I got into the Italian, one of the things I noticed was that the teachers weren't always easy to work with.

One of our teachers was an elderly lady who was temperamental and got agitated very quickly. She would generate tremendous amounts of stress with her outbursts in the classroom. It didn't bother me, and it didn't bother some of the others, but there were people who suffered there. A young African American officer, for example, seemed to be a target of the teacher's blasts more than others. I believe she almost had a nervous breakdown.

The testing process was never credible. The example I just gave is one of the many that I experienced and observed with others, including my son. When he joined the Foreign Service, he had done his MBA at the Helsinki School of Economics, and he, too, had served an LDS mission to Finland. He had grown up in Finland, and he spoke Finnish almost bilingually. But they gave him a 4/3+ when he entered the foreign service. One of the things they asked him to translate was a poem that talked about a bird. It was a bird he'd never heard of in Finnish, but they criticized him because he didn't know the bird's name in English. He was another one who had not gone through the system. You couldn't be much more fluent than he was without being a Finn, but he didn't fit the mold properly.

CLEVERLEY: The linguist who oversaw Italian and the Romance programs prided the program in not giving many 3/3s. Now, if you're in a language designated position and

expected to speak the language in your job, you're supposed to get a 3/3. I couldn't understand why they would pride themselves on not giving 3/3s, because if someone wasn't getting a 3/3, it suggests the program may have failed, not the officer. If they weren't coming up to a 3/3, the program was supposed to somehow help them get there, rather than saying, "Well, we only give like ten percent 3/3s."

Q: Yeah, exactly.

CLEVERLEY: When we went through the Italian test, there was an officer in our class, who had done FSI French and FSI Spanish. On the day of the test, he said, "Look, this testing is all phony. Don't get stressed out about it. When taking the test, all you have to do is use a subjunctive in an "if clause." (e.g., "If I were tall, I could reach the top shelf.") He added, "If you do this, you will get through. Get it ready to go, make sure you're right, and then as soon as the right opportunity comes, use it." We all did that while waiting for our turn. We all had a good one ready to go. In our class, everyone got at least one three. Whereas in the other class that didn't have the benefit of our "tip," they were all twos.

Q: They were all twos.

CLEVERLEY: I can understand the need to have criteria to use for evaluating test results, but it seemed like the criteria drove the program as opposed to the program driving the criteria. When we left, we came out of this thinking, this was weird, but at least we're done with it.

When I went to Athens a few years later, I was again studying at FSI. The officer who's place I was taking then had been selected out, and the job was language designated. So, they were in a rush to fill the position. I got the job with no Greek ability, and I didn't have time to take the FSI Greek course. I had three weeks before departing for post. I decided I would give it my very best try because I wanted to get as much Greek as I could before arriving in Athens, plus fluency in an incentive language like Greek, could eventually get you some incentive pay. In three weeks, I got a 1+/1+.

Q: That's very good.

CLEVERLEY: It was really good except I didn't speak very much Greek. You know, I learned a lot of words, but you don't learn a language like that. In any case, it was hardly enough. When I got to Athens, the ambassador who was a Greek American political appointee expected his senior staff to accompany him on meetings and would only speak Greek. The escorting staff officer needed Greek to understand what was going on in the meeting and write the report. It was clear that I needed a big upgrade. The embassy sent in a request to FSI for funds to allow me to take Greek at post. FSI didn't like to fund full time training at post and refused.

Q: But it was a language designated post, you were supposed to have a 3/3.

CLEVERLEY: That's right, I was supposed to have a 3/3. The post gave me a teacher whom I would meet with one hour twice a week, or something like that. But it wasn't enough. Finally, the post management section got creative and found a way to turn an FSI grant for hourly instruction into a few weeks' full-time class for me at a school called the Athens Center. It wasn't very expensive, maybe \$200 a week. I learned more in that month than I ever could have in a month at FSI. My point here is that FSI refused to recognize the efficiency of training officers abroad. By doing so, it was defaulting on its mission to train officers destined for language designated positions.

Q: But that would affect a number of honey pots at FSI.

CLEVERLEY: Exactly, it is. So, the needs of the officer and post were not the first consideration. The language program was the first consideration in making those decisions. These are just a few criticisms I have of the way it was done. I think it could have been done better at significantly lower costs—

Q: And a better product

CLEVERLEY: And a better product.

Q: And would align, would make for a more honest system because when you said that you were given three weeks of Greek for a language designated post, by definition, the system was first ignoring its own standards and rules, to disadvantage you.

CLEVERLEY: It was hard, you know. There were some officers who were going through FSI Greek who never really used the language much during their whole tour. But if there was an ambassador who required a notetaker for his official Greek conversations, that was serious.

Well, I could talk a lot more about FSI Italian without so many criticisms. The program had three teachers and we had two classes. I found Italian a lot more challenging than I expected. I thought after Finnish, Italian should be easy to learn. The vocabulary was Latin, and you can recognize a lot of the words just from English similarities. But Italian has a more complex grammar than some of the other Romance languages. And although you could pronounce it quite easily, getting the grammar right required a little bit of work. I worked more with Italian than I ever expected I would.

There were several young officers and a mid-level officer. One in my class was working for the Foreign Agricultural Service, and I had known him when I worked there. He was on his way to Rome to be the assistant agricultural attaché. I was the only person going to the consulate general in Milan. Others were assigned to Turin and Naples, and several to Rome. I thought the system for learning the language was actually quite good because as we sat and talked, we learned a lot more without trying than we ever expected. Comparing it to what I had seen at Ricks when we were teaching Finnish, it wasn't nearly as intense. For one thing, it was five or six hours a day. But it wasn't ten or twelve hours a day like at Ricks. And we probably weren't as motivated.

I came out with a 2+/3. I couldn't concentrate on the language training more than I did. I mentioned earlier that Seija was expecting and gave birth while I was in Italian. This was our fourth child whom we named Markus Christopher. Seija had no family close by, and my family was on the west coast. She had little help, and language training had a fairly strict no leave policy. It was a tremendous amount of work and struggle for her.

Q: And they had no childcare in those days.

CLEVERLEY: No childcare whatsoever, no. So, I got a couple of days off, and then some friends helped and things like that. But that was a source of anxiety when I was studying Italian. Before the baby, she also came down with pneumonia. It just was a difficult moment personally for me, and especially for my wife and family.

Q: Yeah, and you still hadn't gotten to your first post, which is usually something of a shock as well.

CLEVERLEY: That's true. Our home in Gaithersburg was nicely set off into the woods. We were in a condominium complex, with trees and a swimming pool. It was just a comfortable, beautiful place. So, we were happy living there.

Q: And no family support.

CLEVERLEY: And no family support. So, when I came out with the 2+/3, I was OK with that. I just wanted to get through it. I wanted to learn enough Italian that I would feel comfortable when I got to the post. I was sure I could get that 2+ up to 3, and once I started speaking the language in Milan I eventually reached a 3+/3+ level.

Milan, Italy 1976-1978

Q: Yeah. And what was your understanding of your job before you got there, before you got to Milan?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I didn't know exactly what to expect. I knew in general it was diplomacy on economic topics. I understood the difference between an embassy and a consulate. There would be no ministries that I had to interface with. I would be interfacing mainly with public and private institutions. I also knew that Milano was the commercial and economic center of northern Italy, and Italy itself. What I didn't understand yet was that it was also an economic and commercial center for all of Europe. The region Lombardy around Milan was one of the richest in Europe. We understood that south of Florence was something quite different from the north.

Q: Did you have a sense of what that meant before you went to Italy?

CLEVERLEY: They carefully gave us some cultural instruction along the way. We even saw a couple of movies. It was clear that southern Italy was greatly impoverished. Later I would learn that over half of the population of Milan was not born there but in the south.

Q: The cultural difference or class differences?

CLEVERLEY: There were cultural and class differences. One of the things I also understood was that I would need to use the Italian language because English was not spoken too commonly.

Q: Interesting. Is that still true today or has that changed? Or do you know—

CLEVERLEY: Maybe not as much as it was then, but Italians generally do not speak languages, not like Northern Europeans.

Q: They're very self-contained and satisfied.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, they are, for very good reasons. I realized that it was going to be a big intense economic commercial operation when I got to post. But I didn't understand exactly how I would fit into that and what exactly they expected me to do. I didn't meet anybody from post while at FSI. Of course, I corresponded with my predecessor and the post, But those types of letters were more formalities. There wasn't a lot of detail, everything was general.

Q: So, how did you get from Washington, D.C. to Milan? What was your arrival and settling in process like? And what was your job when you got there?

CLEVERLEY: Okay, well, my arrival. This was the bicentennial year. We wanted to stay in Washington through the Fourth of July '76. And fortunately, the post was okay with that. Our departure was scheduled for a few days after the Fourth of July. My parents and uncle and aunt all drove across the United States to be with us during the Fourth. So, we had house guests, and then we moved out of the house, shipped our things, checked into temporary housing, and then a few days later, left.

Now, a question was how easy it was for a mother and four very small children to move into temporary housing in Italy. To make that a little easier, we decided that we would fly first to Finland. Seija and the children would stay there with her parents. It would be a good opportunity for the children to get to know their grandparents, and vice versa. I would go on to post for however long it took to get into permanent housing. She was to come when we had a place to live.

Milano in 1976

When I arrived in Milan, I was excited to find a place that I liked with interesting people, and things to do. Milan, and northern Italy, generally, in 1976, were effectively run. It had only been thirty years since the war, and all of the devastation that came with it, and yet they had rebuilt this region remarkably. People felt confident and were starting to live

well again. They were wealthy by Italian and European standards. Not everybody was rich, of course, but the region and the city worked and functioned. Unemployment was relatively low. Their lives and their kids' lives were getting better.

Q: And well dressed.

CLEVERLEY: They certainly knew how to dress, and they had style, but not just the bankers. I was fortunate enough to get to know truck drivers and others who were not very high on your economic totem pole. And they dressed as well as the bankers. You couldn't tell their class or their work by what they wore.

Q: Yeah

CLEVERLEY: Or by what they ate. The working classes may not have eaten in the most expensive restaurants, but there were plenty of inexpensive restaurants that served good food. And nobody made food as well as the Italians themselves at home. They were also articulate, although sometimes expressions were rather ornate, like when reading the *Corriere della Sera*, Milan's newspaper, where it often took five paragraphs to get to the story

*Q: Well, their history was a bit longer than ours. And they never have forgotten this.
[laughter]*

CLEVERLEY: It was like a metal thread that was very elaborate and ran far back into the past. They were anxious to meet American diplomats, and the World War was in their minds as if it had been only a few years before. And certainly, the people who were fifty plus had lived it in often tragic ways. I never met anyone who wasn't in the resistance. Most of them weren't, obviously, but they all were when they talked to us.

Q: Right. Who controlled Milan politically at that time?

CLEVERLEY: The mayor of Milan was a member of the Italian Socialist Party, a party similar to social democrats elsewhere in Europe. The Christian Democrats, the party that had controlled the country since the war, was on the right side of the spectrum. But voters saw them as corrupt. The communists were thought to be honest. So, many voters who wanted a better system of government had difficult choices. Either they voted for the ruling party that was known as corrupt, or the Left, with its communists whom they didn't like, but at least had a reputation for getting things done. I could understand the dilemma and can understand it even better now.

Q: Yeah, honesty and competent management was their mark.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, it was so. I could understand that type of choice and can understand it even better now.

Q: Right. Tell me about, either your preparation or once you got there, because what you're referring to is the rise of Eurocommunism—and growing—because of their reputation for good management and relative honesty. The growth of the Communist Party in Italy, was that part of your brief? Was that part of the environment in which you were working, particularly as an economic officer? Or was that something the consul general spent more time on?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, let me tell you how this post was structured. And then how we divided our work. The post had a consul general who was the FSO-1 at that time, that would be like an MC (Minister Counselor) level officer today. He was well experienced, spoke Italian perfectly.

Q: Do you remember who he was?

CLEVERLEY: His name was Thomas Fina. He had Italian heritage. Very competent in many ways. His executive officer was a mid level officer, Lacy Wright.

They were doing the political side of things. We had a large U.S. trade center operation that had an officer-in-charge and three commercial/trade officers that also served as the consulate's commercial section. Then we had the consular section with a couple of officers, a DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) office, and some others. Also, a big USIS (United States Information Service) American Center on the design street, via Montenapoleone, extremely well located.

The consulate in Venice had closed in the 1960s and the city was now in our consular district if I remember correctly. Vicenza was as well, but the base there was a political military issue handled by the Embassy in Rome. We did not have a security officer in Milan, so our security issues were managed out of Rome as well. The Rome security office sent the consul general a car they said was armored. He didn't believe it adequately protected anyone and requested better armoring but got no response. So, he asked one of the DEA agents working in the consulate to shoot at a sheet of the window armor. The bullet went right through. Rome and the Department were infuriated, and embarrassed.

Q: Yeah. Did you have a library? A USIS library?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, we had a USIS library and there were two officers.

Q: It was USIA (United States Information Agency) at that time, but yeah, a USIA library.

CLEVERLEY: So, we had two officers there and one of them was fairly senior. It was a fairly large consulate. But the overall thrust was in the direction of promoting trade. My job, the economic officer's job, was reporting on economic topics and sometimes dealing with political problems American firms encountered. Thomas Fina was a very good writer. He placed a lot of responsibility on Lacy, who was an English major, if I remember correctly, and he wrote well too. I was writing for them and learned a lot about drafting and foreign service reporting.

The two of them did the political work and I would do anything that was economic. The commercial and trade officers at the trade center took care of all the commercial work, promotion, trade promotions, and export promotion work. So, I didn't really integrate into them, but was part of this political operation at the main offices at the consulate. I did whatever Thomas Fina then wanted done, whatever report he thought interesting.

How to do Reporting

Fina's philosophy on reporting was to think of yourself as a reporter for *Time* magazine. You go out to meet people, and you analyze and write about what they tell you. You use the fairly colloquial style of writing like you find in *Time's* columns. The report should be provocative and should interest people in the front office of the European Bureau who should want to read it. That was your audience: the assistant secretary, and the deputy assistant secretaries.

Q: That's your audience, yes.

CLEVERLEY: The assistant secretary, and the deputy assistant secretaries. I should emphasize that reporting in the field was much more important to our Washington home base than it may be today. Without the internet, email, messaging, and cheap telecommunications, reporting and especially thoughtful analysis was the principal way Washington agencies kept track of foreign trends and developments. Fina, of course, recognized we were working in a consulate, and a State Department bureau usually first turned to embassy reporting on political and economic topics.

Q: What did they normally pay attention to in a consulate?

CLEVERLEY: It was never clear how much Washington expected from a Consulate, but Fina was determined he was going to be on the principals' desks, and they were going to read what he had to say—at least the summary of any cable he wrote, which they probably did. He was so good at it that a couple of years later I saw an article he had written for, I think, *State Magazine* on reporting: how to write a report. He was recognized for the competency and quality that he brought to the reporting process.

Fina defined what he had to offer as consul general at a constituent post. He wasn't DCM or head of the political section in Rome, but outside the capital. But we wrote about what the people in northern Italy told us. They were people who were making the money and who were influential in the country. Our reporting told what those politically economically key people thought.

Q: Yeah. And it was always quite distinct from the south, from the capital. And it was the economic engine of the country.

CLEVERLEY: Our reporting usually involved getting out and meeting people, a lot of influential people, from bankers, to mayors, to editors, and reporting back, saying this

person said that, and that's because of this, and so on. And you developed a whole analytical structure based on your conversations with the people you met. Fina would use only telegrams to convey our reporting, avoiding the old "airgrams" that were type-written, usually long, and sent to Washington by couriers. He knew that no one read airgrams, and I found this out myself, during my next assignment when in the European Bureau an entire room was found full of unread and undistributed airgrams from various posts.

Q: How did you get out and meet people? What did you come to—because that was not your job in Washington. That had not been your job previously. What did you learn about getting out and meeting, connecting, engaging, developing relationships with foreigners? Was it anything like evangelizing in Finland, for example, for the church?

CLEVERLEY: Well, in a way, I guess, I hadn't thought of that. But it had some similarities for sure. They were very good mentors—Fina and Lacy—I was really lucky on my first assignment. How did we get out? Well, initially Lacy would take me with him to a provincial capital, like Verona or Parma, for example. We had a heavy schedule of meetings with the community elite—no information officers—but the top dogs, on a specific topic Lacy or Tom Fina had in mind.

Q: Were these trips done in Italian, and were you the note taker?

CLEVERLEY: They were usually done in Italian unless the speaker was really proficient in English. I was the note taker. But Lacy would write it up. He took his own notes initially, so that I would see how this is done. We would take a consulate car and driver. We had a day of interesting interviews with the top people in Verona, for example—the mayor, the editor of the newspaper. One of the things I learned was that I was not just a vice consul at the American Consulate in Milano but an American diplomat, and the top people would talk to me, even if I was a first tour vice consul. So, it didn't matter if the guy was the president of an Italian federation or the director of the Chase Manhattan Bank. Just call up, make that appointment, and go.

If I talked to somebody in the bowels of an organization, I might get something useful, but probably not for our purpose of taking the political pulse of the community elite. First I sought to talk to the top guy in the organization. This is where the political economic thinking was going on. If they didn't want to see you, then you didn't see anyone. What was important was the quality of the discussion. So, that's what we did in Milan and throughout Lombardy. After I'd done this awhile and had learned how they wanted it done, I went on my own. Usually, but not always, I would take my senior FSN (Foreign Service National), Gianni Scandelli. He would help with the language if I needed help, or he would make sure that I got to the right places at the right times. Gianni was in his 50s. So, he had been around the block a few times.

Q: He was your facilitator and your native informant.

CLEVERLEY: And my local mentor.

Q: Tell us about that.

CLEVERLEY: Gianni became my local mentor. I was twenty-eight years old, my first time in the Foreign Service. Gianni was a mountain climber, a cross country skier, and a bicyclist in his 50s, who had worked at the consulate doing economic work for decades. And he was supposed to report to me. Initially, there was a little friction in the wheels, but we soon worked it out.

Q: Had he fought in the war?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I'm not exactly sure, he never told me war stories. I'm sure he had his war stories, but it was not something he ever talked about.

Q: But he certainly remembers the era.

CLEVERLEY: Backwards and forwards, of course. Now, let me just diverge a little bit and come back. One of the things that I took with me, of course, is that I was a Mormon. I was religious, and I went to church on Sunday. When I first got there, I noticed there was some prejudice against that. One of the senior officers said, "I've often wondered how an intelligent person can belong to your faith," which I took as an insult. But I just said, "Well, you know, that's what they said to the followers of Christ in His day, too." And he never said anything more.

It taught me a lesson, don't wear your faith on your sleeve. Just leave whatever you are to your own family and orient yourself professionally with everybody you work with. I did that for the rest of my career, and I found it worked well. Occasionally, there were difficult moments since Mormons don't drink alcohol or smoke tobacco. To not drink wine was something almost totally incomprehensible in Italy. Teetotalers then were also quite uncommon in the Foreign Service. That was not my experience during the latter part of my career when I worked for two or three ambassadors in a row who were abstinent. But at that time, it was something rare.

Q: Food, sex, and wine.

Farming the Po Valley

CLEVERLEY: The issue arose during a trip I made after Tom Fina asked me to take on a report on agriculture in the fertile Po Valley with an eye on what was it about European agriculture that made it less competitive than American agriculture. I went out into the countryside to visit farms and agricultural organizations. I analyzed statistics to see how the sector was structured. On one of these trips, we went to Verona. I was supposed to meet a range of people including the association of farmers and wine growers. It was a big agricultural organization of importance in the province of Verona.

Q: Interesting. Yeah, important.

CLEVERLEY: When they heard I was coming, they invited me to lunch. Gianni Scandelli was with me. As soon as we sat down, they announced, “Everything on the table has been grown on our farms.” It was an unforgettable meal. Then they came to the wine, “...including our wine. We have several different varieties we want you to try.” I said, “You know, I don't drink alcohol at all.” Their quick response: “Not a problem. Wine isn't alcohol.”

Gianni Scandelli came to my rescue, and it was something that I would have never thought to say, “He has taken a vow that he will abstain from alcohol.” That was essentially true. As soon as he said that, everything was fine. “Why didn't you tell us earlier? We understand. It's not an issue.” Afterwards, Gianni said, “After this, anytime anyone offers you something strong to drink, just say you've taken a vow, and they will understand.” So again, one of those cultural things that you would never as an American necessarily pick up on, or not easily.

Q: Yeah, exactly, so you still had to explain.

CLEVERLEY: It was not an issue most of the time. What you drank at the lunch table, at the dinner table, nobody paid that much attention.

Q: Oh, well, tell me what you concluded about Italian agriculture in the Po Valley?

CLEVERLEY: I came to some important conclusions which benefited my understanding throughout my career, because I worked a lot in Western Europe, particularly the European Union, and with the EU's Common Agricultural Policy [CAP]. What I learned doing that report was probably more valuable to me than anybody who ever read it. It really came down to a couple of things, and one of them was size. In the rich Po Valley, even a big farm was only 40 hectares (about 100 acres), which was not very much. Most farms were a fraction of that. It meant, in practice, that you did a lot of the work by hand, which was terribly unproductive. Or you bought an expensive piece of equipment, a tractor or something that cost a lot, to farm a small piece of land. In other words, the costs of production were very high due to lower scales of production and an expensive capital/land ratio.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: To deal with this problem, the CAP came up with different mechanisms. One of them was to give grants to farmers to buy tractors. But that's not very productive. When you thought about it, that just passed the cost of unproductivity from the farmer to the community. Another thing the CAP did was to protect the farmers through trade mechanisms, forcing American farm exporters to bear the cost of European unproductivity.

Q: Yeah, the United States was the free market, as opposed to the guided market.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. My grandfather had eighty acres. When he couldn't make a living farming eighty acres, then he rented another eighty acres and had a hundred and sixty. When he couldn't make a living off that, he got a second job. But that didn't happen in Italy, probably didn't happen in most of Europe.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: They keep trying to farm these small unproductive plots and expect the central authority to subsidize them, so the family doesn't have to leave. Quite often, the last thing many wanted was to leave their farms.

Q: Yeah. On the other hand, there are consequences for industrialized agriculture, not all of which are advantageous or healthy.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that's true.

Q: And quality is questionable.

CLEVERLEY: Of course, especially in northern Italy there were different types of products that were unique, like Parma ham.

Q: Yes.

CLEVERLEY: Things like that, which you can't replicate easily in the United States. In that case, we sometimes just banned imports. At that time, we would not allow in Parma ham because it was not cooked. Of course, that is what made Parma ham what it was. I got a lot of complaints from ham producers. It was a chance to see as an insider the weaknesses in the world trading system.

Q: The trademarking of products from Italy like the Parma ham, was that common at that time? Was that a way to get around copying or industrializing by other people? How did that work?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, they wanted to protect the names of various types of cheese, for example. It was being discussed in the GATT. Things like cheese and wine were Italy's comparative advantage, as was Parma ham. They wanted to protect them so that somebody in Minnesota didn't market it under the name of their product.

Q: Yeah. Better known as prosciutto.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, Prosciutto di Parma was a specific and especially sought after type of prosciutto.

Q: Which is copied by everybody now.

CLEVERLEY: That's right, there are a lot of different kinds of prosciutto around, but only one Prosciutto di Parma. Once you've lived and eaten in Italy, you can't eat "Italian Food" anywhere else.

Q: How did you assess and relate to the industrial sector?

CLEVERLEY: Well, in those days, the Department of State and the Department of Commerce cooperated on a reporting program called the CERP, or Common Economic Reporting Program. I guess the end users were mainly at the Department of Commerce, but the State Department was expected to deliver the analytical reports.

So, there were target sectors like office equipment, shoes, textiles, automobiles, and so on. You received a tasker from Washington to come up with a report at least once a year on a specified date, on the shoe industry, for example. Textiles was another big one in northern Italy. They wanted production and trade figures, as well as a survey of trends and expectations. Gianni and I would draft these reports.

Sometimes it was mundane, but usually useful and interesting for me as a young economic officer. I would go to half a dozen shoe factories. Some of them were operating with twenty-four employees and marketing their shoes in New York City. And some were huge factories where they were turning out hundreds or thousands of pairs a day. We talked to people in the industry and got to know them. Sometimes, they thought it was spy work. But the older people knew that we did it every year and were usually happy to tell us about their industry and show us their factories. They knew we were trying to find market information for our own producers on what was happening abroad.

Q: Yeah. Open sources and open relationships.

CLEVERLEY: We didn't have to pay for it. I don't know what the quality of the product was globally. I suspect sometimes an American shoe manufacturer was happy to get information from us on shoe production in a place like Italy. But many companies might have their own sources of information internally or through their associations that had polished annual reports containing things an American competitor might need or want to know.

Q: How did you divide the work with Turin, which was also in an industrial, commercial area with a consulate? And not that far from Milan.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, it was, but it wasn't as difficult as it would seem, because they only had two officers in Turin at the time, the consul general and a young intro-officer. They didn't have the resources really to throw at some of the firms like, for example, Olivetti, which was a big manufacturer of office equipment, typewriters, and things like that in the Turin consular district.

We would take care of it out of Milan, and I made more than one trip to Olivetti's headquarters and factory situated at the foot of the Alps, not far from Turin. I'm sure the

consul general kept in touch with the Olivetti family. But our job was to go to the factory to meet the people who could tell us what we wanted to know. It was functional and easy, and actually worked out best for both sides.

Q: Yeah. Must have been a very—did you feel lucky having the job?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I did, very lucky. I was well-mentored, and I felt I got a chance to do interesting things. I was on the fringe of the commercial operations so I could take advantage of things like trade shows that were going on. But living in Italy was not always easy. At first, I was impatient, with my northern European mentality I suppose. I expected things to work functionally and easily. Nothing in Italy, even in northern Italy, worked smoothly usually. One day, early in the tour, Seija said simply, “They are Italians, that’s why they’re colorful and interesting. Accept what they are and don’t get so impatient.” She was right. When I started doing that, I found everything immensely easier.

Q: They weren't Americans. They had very long histories and memories. And they did live better than anybody else.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, they did. I learned that Italians were personable and warm. I learned personal things of value, like dressing decently and not looking like I was a boomer from the 60s. I learned the value of eating well. I learned to be a little bit more nuanced in the way I spoke, the way the Italians always were.

We had a lot of issues that were related to having a small family at the post. When my wife arrived with the children, we were able to move directly into an apartment that a Korean diplomat had had. We took over the lease. It was a typical Italian apartment in a fairly nice location with high ceilings. The building was probably built in 1912, which was young for Italy. But when we walked in the first time, it had a couple of wires coming out of the ceiling, no fixtures, no kitchen cabinets. It had a toilet. And that was typical. When you rented an apartment, you bought the wardrobes, kitchen cabinets, and the light fixtures.

Q: And stoves and washing machine. Did you have a washing machine?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I’ll tell you about the washing machine. We didn’t have one in the apartment and bought one along with all of the extra stuff, which cost quite a lot of money on a young officer’s budget.

Q: Yeah, how did you manage?

CLEVERLEY: We borrowed money to do it. I hoped that I could pay the loan off when we left, when we sold it to somebody else. And it worked out that way.

Q: Did you borrow from an American bank or an Italian bank or other sources?

CLEVERLEY: From the State Department Credit Union.

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: I can't remember whether it was a line of credit. It got us by for a couple of years. And then we had a series of personal family emergencies. Like a week after our car arrived, it was stolen.

Q: Oh, no.

CLEVERLEY: When I went out one morning to drive to work, I noticed shopkeepers were watching from all the corners because they knew it had been stolen before I did, of course. So, it was gone, and we didn't have a car. We bought a car from an officer who was departing post, but it wasn't available for a month. And so for that month we rode public transportation with our little children. When we finally did get the car, we were in three accidents over the assignment, none of them our fault.

One of them revealed much about Italy. Seija and I were driving on our way to the consul general's residence for a dinner party one evening when a car pulled right in front of us and I ran into the fender. No one was hurt or anything. It was in the evening, around seven o'clock. I realized that I was a foreigner who didn't know how things were done in Italy. There were four guys wearing dark suits in the car, and I went over to talk to them. They said not to worry, they had insurance and knew it was their fault. They promised to take care of everything.

I realized that I was a foreigner who didn't know how things were done in Italy and replied that I would like to do a police report and wanted to call the police. They quickly told me not to do that. I started to walk across the street to a phone when another car zoomed up, an Alfa Romeo. All four guys jumped out, satchels in their hand, got into the other car, and took off, completely abandoning their car. Before they deserted the scene, I had got from them the name of their insurance company.

I filed a claim with my insurance company. My car was still drivable. They abandoned their car and left it on the spot for days before somebody towed it away. Finally, my insurance company, USAA, wrote a letter saying they were paying off the repair charges. Although the owner of the other car should cover it, the other party was associated with organized crime. That was apparently the easiest way to handle the case.

Q: I'm surprised that USAA even admitted that.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I was surprised too. That was only one of many things that happened to us while on this assignment. We had a hyperactive little baby boy who did all kinds of things, like eating moth balls, or—

Q: Oh my gosh.

CLEVERLEY: He was in the emergency room, probably three or four times when we were there. Our daughter, Kaarina, had an accident on the playground and had a concussion. We took her, too, to the emergency room. Then the last thing was the washing machine, which we bought from an American. It had a transformer. One day, when I was in the office, my wife urgently called to say our two-year-old boy, Markus, had come to tell her the house was on fire. Seija went to look, and yes the transformer had burst into flame for some reason, and the cleaning closet was on fire.

Q: Oh dear.

CLEVERLEY: The building's doorman or woman had called the fire department, and a fire truck was on its way. I had to get across the city to get home. Because of the traffic, I reasoned, a taxi would get me there faster than driving myself. So, I hailed a taxi, and we started off. I told him, "Can you make it fast? My house is on fire." He said, "Oh, sure, sure. Your house is on fire." He didn't speed up, and I was having a stress attack.

Q: Yeah, exactly.

CLEVERLEY: So I used a quite useful tactic that I had found Italians resorted to all the time. I yelled in a loud voice at him saying, "I wasn't joking. My house really is on fire." When we got there, his eyes were large when he saw there was a fire. Fortunately, the damage was contained to the washroom and hadn't spread to the rest of the house.

All these things happened over a relatively short two-year assignment. Right after the fire, Tom Fina called me into his office and said, "I understand you've had a lot of fun things happening in your life lately," He said, "even a fire. So, how's your wife doing?" I replied, "What Seija's had to go through has not been easy." Fina said, "Yeah, that's what I was thinking," and added, "so I want to make an offer to you. I would like you to travel to Merano. No one from the consulate has been there for a while."

Q: Yes, it's what? Oh, I had understood Murano. I was thinking the island off of Venice. But Merano?

CLEVERLEY: Murano is off Venice. Merano is a beautiful town north of Verona near the Austrian border. It was in our consular district. Fina told me he wanted me to make an official visit there but with two conditions. One, I would be expected to file a report on what's happening in that part of Italy. And the second condition was I must take my wife with me without children and to pay for her myself.

I thought that was a pretty good offer, and it was a great trip. We had friends who lived just over the Austrian border, and they agreed to take the children for a few days. Merano was actually a very interesting place. The town was in an alpine valley, and up above it the area still lacked electrification and functional roads. This was in the mid-70s. It was a part of Europe we never expected to find.

Q: Not to mention a part of Italy that you wouldn't have expected.

Mormons in Italy

CLEVERLEY: We had gone to church when we first got there and met people in the local congregation. There were four congregations in Milan. Ours had maybe had a hundred people. They were all Italians, and none of them were professionals, just ordinary people with ordinary jobs.

They were terribly excited to meet a young American family. When we went to church, the children would disappear, even the baby. The Italians took them over. They gave us a tremendous amount of support, especially as we were wandering through this different environment, with all these difficult issues. For example, when our daughter had a concussion and was hospitalized for a few days, we didn't understand immediately that when you were hospitalized in Italy, the hospital didn't provide any support, just a room and a bed.

The people in our congregation brought sandwiches and food, anything we needed over the course of two days. When our car was stolen, we were a month on public transportation. They came to pick us up for church. And not just those new Italian friends, but also the families in the consulate were very supportive. They got to know Seija quickly. We never felt alone.

Q: Yeah. They must have been very impressed because you and your family were in a sense, original Mormons and they were converted, adoptive. Was there anything in that lineage, or the evangelized community into Mormonism versus the church that your family knew, grew up in and helped build? Effectively, how did that work or was it irrelevant?

CLEVERLEY: No, it was relevant. It was different. They were fascinated by us, because, as I mentioned earlier, the church comes with a whole program. There is no professional priesthood to do the work, or administer the young people's programs, women's programs, and so forth. And most of these people were converts. The longest any person in the congregation had been there was only six years.

The Catholic Church in Italy had traditionally opposed the entry into Italy of other faiths. Our church was not allowed in Italy until around 1970 or so. So, they were an inexperienced congregation trying to put everything together. I could explain something I had seen done all my life, and a few words could clarify something that would have taken a long time to figure out. So, yes, we had something to offer them, too. On their part, there was a freshness. Even churches develop bureaucracies. Well, these people didn't have any bureaucracy, they just had faith and a willingness to help others however they could.

Q: And they had broken from—because in a certain sense, you couldn't be Italian without being Catholic. How did that play? Why had they left the Catholic Church? What had brought them? You've intimated to some degree but leaving and turning your back on the

church was not new in Italy. It was one of the—Communist Party was the beneficiary of the lack of choice, if you will, among religious paths in Italy. But what had drawn people for example, to the Mormon church versus communism? Or I don't know, maybe there were other evangelical faiths operating by that time.

CLEVERLEY: I think that it was similar in some senses to what I had known in Finland. Where you have a state church, religion is not necessarily elective. In the United States, churches are often elected; one can choose what appeals to them. You choose to belong to a church – or not. If you go to church, it's usually because you choose to. Even if you are born into a religion like I was, there is also a sense that alternatives exist, and this can keep religion vibrant. A state church is an institutional tradition that you're born into, and for many in Italy, the Catholic church was often more a tradition than a church. There wasn't always a lot of affinity between Italians on the ground levels toward the Catholic church per se. It was something that had always been there, their ancestors had always been a part of, and they were too. For some, it was not always easy to change to something else they chose, but for others, it wasn't so difficult, either.

Q: It wasn't cost free.

CLEVERLEY: Social prejudice, especially within the family, was often the hardest part. Change wasn't cost free. Sometimes, they suffered from prejudices, but other times it wasn't such a big deal, depending on family circumstances. People came from a lot of different backgrounds. Normally people attended their Catholic church on Easter and the big holidays. So, for some, it wasn't that difficult to break away from a tradition that their friends and their family had not really practiced for a long time. They were looking for something new, and they tired quickly of the Catholic tradition.

Q: How many are there today, do you know?

CLEVERLEY: Membership in Italy today is in the 20,000s.

Q: In Italy or just in the Milan area?

CLEVERLEY: No, in Italy. The LDS church is still small, but it is reaching a better accommodation with the Catholic church than before. When we were there in the 70s, one of the problems that the LDS congregations encountered was that they couldn't get permission to build chapels. Church and civilian authorities wouldn't give building permits. Now they do. In fact, the Mormons just built a beautiful temple in Rome. In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, there's a wave of secularization, and most people aren't religious in any form. They're not attracted to any church.

Slicing a Cross-Section of Society

Q: Yeah, you had a church family.

CLEVERLEY: For us, however, the Mormon congregation was like a family. And one characteristic of our career, wherever we went, was that there would always be a ready-made family there. I remember Tom Fina calling me into his office one day. He said when he got invitations, they were to a specific type of event. "I've often wondered what it's like in an ordinary Italian home. What do truck drivers eat? What do they do? What do they say, and what do they think?" He wanted to talk to me about that because he knew I had an insight there that he thought was useful.

Q: Yeah, and very important, because life does tend to bubble up from the bottom. It takes a long time, sooner or later, but if you want to have any kind of "look forward" or strategic perspective, just concentrating on the elite is probably not the wisest thing to do.

CLEVERLEY: Yes. Accurately keeping a finger on the pulse of society requires observing the full cross-section of its people. I think this is a criticism that has been levied at the Foreign Service in the past. We have hobnobbed so much with the elites in society that sometimes we have lost touch with the real picture. Some of these unexpected political cataclysms that have happened went unpredicted. It wasn't just the CIA, the State Department didn't see them coming, either. Predictions were missing about the fall of the Iron Curtain, the depth of the revolution in Iran, and so forth. It's easy to do. I know how easy it is.

Q: Yeah, well, because diplomacy operates, ideally, on two levels. It is a system for government-to-government communication, and that's necessarily elite. The truck drivers don't play in that story, sorry. It's not that they're not important. They just aren't important right now. On the other hand, you better keep an eye on the truck drivers because they could eventually affect what the officials and the establishment and the government are going to be interested in. So, you really, it is a chess game or it's a chess reporting challenge. You've got to do it on several levels.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. In a smooth-running society like Great Britain, you know, things have been the same for a long time. But if you have turbulence somewhere within the insides of society, it's harder to judge what's happening when you're only talking to the people in government or the decision makers in the economic sector.

Q: Or in the capital. It sounds like you were extremely fortunate in your mentoring, but also had a very, very rich introduction to diplomatic service and service abroad in your time in Milan. If there's not anything else that you want to add to that, how did your next assignment come about?

Urban Terrorism – The Red Brigades

CLEVERLEY: Okay, let me just add maybe one thing. While we were there, it was the heyday of urban terrorism and—

Q: Oh, yes, small minor detail. Was Aldo Moro killed while you were there?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, Former Prime Minister Aldo Moro was kidnapped and killed, and the Red Brigades were operating quite freely in Milano. A lot of people were being kneecapped and shot. The head of one of the American banks was shot in the legs one morning as he came out of his home on his way to work. I heard it on the news and went over to the hospital to see him. I knew him well. This was part of the turbulence in 1970s Italy. A few years after we left Milan, General Dozier, one of the generals at the American base in Vicenza, was kidnapped. An elite Italian/American operation succeeded in freeing him.

Security was a big issue for the consulate. We tried to be careful and had policemen inside the consulate with submachine guns. Unfortunately, we were more concerned that the police might drop or trigger the submachine gun inside the consulate than we were of the terrorists. The policemen we had were not educated or professional. They loved their comic books. These were not the elite Italian carabinieri, but ordinary poorly trained and paid policemen.

Q: That must have been—was that handled out of Rome? Was that handled out of Milan? The two of them?

CLEVERLEY: We reported on anything happening in the consular district. Personal security was a matter we all took seriously, although no American diplomat was ever harmed to the best of my knowledge.

The Next Assignment

My next assignment process began when I simply received a cable saying I had been assigned to the consular section in Toronto. This was the first time I had heard of the job in Toronto, and I started looking into what I would be doing there. Toronto itself was okay, but I would be in a non-immigrant visa section of nearly twenty officers. I had not had consular training, and there was no time for it before I had to report for duty. I didn't know much about consular work. I had been a backup consular officer, but we had two consular officers in Milan, and I had minimal experience.

To me, it was unfair, because I would be competing in the evaluation process against people who knew what they were doing. So, I sent a cable saying I didn't agree with the assignment and explained the specific issue was my need for consular training before going to post. Otherwise, I would feel discriminated against. I wanted the training or to have the assignment broken. The Department answered there was no time to give me the consular course and broke the assignment. My career counselor called to tell me it had been a huge mistake for me to send that cable. As it turned out, it wasn't, but I didn't have an ongoing assignment until almost the end of my time in Milan.

Finally, almost at the end of my tour, the Department offered an assignment in Helsinki as an economic officer. It was coming up in one year and was a language designated job. Normally, the Department would send someone to forty-four weeks of Finnish before the

job began. However, because I already spoke Finnish, they would assign me and avoid the cost of training someone new. I learned that I would return to Washington for a one-year assignment as a staff assistant to the assistant secretary of the European bureau (EUR). It was perfect. An assignment in Helsinki was something we had always dreamed about, and I thought working in EUR would be a valuable experience.

Q: Oh, absolutely, and would give you an eye to how a department worked in a way that going to Toronto would not.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, it was a much better career move. For a first assignment, I really couldn't have expected anything better than the job in Milan. Over the two years, I never stopped learning, professionally and personally. And when I departed Milan, I felt that I was a different person and a better officer. Lacy Wright and Tom Fina were important mentors. I had written things before, but I used continually and successfully the reporting techniques they taught throughout my career.

I still have fond memories of those days in northern Italy. Sure, there were a lot of personal issues, which were not easy at the time. But they were all part of the life that we had chosen. Probably it helped that we were younger then. It was all an adventure.

Q: Excellent, yeah. Well, we'll start there next session. This has been a very rich first assignment. I suspect that not every assignment will take as much time, but I think, first assignments are always special, and they are transformative in many, many ways. Sometimes good and sometimes bad but yours sounds like it was very multidimensional, very rich, and in the end, very lucky and very good. So, thank you for sharing that with us.

CLEVERLEY: Well, thank you Stephanie. Thank you for the good questioning and moving us along properly.

Q: But I'm glad you added the terrorism to the mix because that was certainly a transformative moment, particularly the death of the Prime Minister of Italy, Aldo Moro. It gets to be a very crucial time in the Cold War and in geostrategic terms, because Italy also becomes a very key player in the INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) negotiations and the play of getting Europe to support putting in missiles as a counter to Russia. So, a very important addition there. We'll see you on Monday.

CLEVERLEY: All right, Monday, ten-thirty. Thanks so much. Bye.

Q: This is February 28, Monday morning at 9:00am. Stephanie Kinney, doing the interview for Michael Cleverley's oral history. We left off at the end of Michael's first tour overseas in Milan as an economic officer and found himself assigned to Canada—an assignment that was changed and instead—because Helsinki was coming up in a year and they needed a Finnish speaker for the job. He was able to spend time in the

Department itself as a special assistant to the assistant secretary of EUR (Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs). Have I got that correct, Michael?

European Bureau, US Department of State 1978-1979

CLEVERLEY: Yes, but actually, I was a staff assistant. There was also a special assistant.

Q: What did that involve?

CLEVERLEY: All right. Well, before I left Milano in June, 1978, I called the Department, and they wanted me there as soon as possible—like, yesterday. It was the assistant secretary's office, and they said they wanted no gaps. I wanted to get there quickly. I flew with Seija and the children to Finland where she would spend time with her parents. We had three children under five and one child, a hyperactive one, two years old. She planned to stay at her home for a month. After getting them settled, I flew directly to Washington. When I got there, I called the office to tell them I had arrived. “Oh, you've made it already. We didn't expect you to be here so soon,” they said. And so, I learned the common State routine to say we need you yesterday, but really, we don't.

Q: Everything is negotiable.

CLEVERLEY: Right. The European Bureau was the largest regional bureau in the Department of State. It covered many of the biggest issues that were going on at that time: the Cold War, the Soviet Union, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and the transformation of the European Community into what became the European Union. It was a very busy place and was headed by George Vest. Vest was an outstanding officer and person. You always knew when he arrived in the building, at least on our floor, because he whistled everywhere he went. My colleague called him the “whistling warbler.” He heard her say that once and liked it, so he called himself the whistling warbler.

Q: And he later—it was that after or before he became director general for the Foreign Service.

CLEVERLEY: This was before he became director of Foreign Service. He later went to bureaucratic purgatory because when Ronald Reagan was elected, people like George Vest, Rozanne Ridgway, and many others who had held senior positions in the Jimmy Carter administration—although they were career professionals in every way—were relegated to the basement quite literally, until eventually rehabilitated.

Also, in the front office were maybe five deputy assistant secretaries and a special assistant who was an 04 officer (an 02 officer in today's foreign service). James Goodby, whom I will mention later, was one of the deputy assistant secretaries. A colleague and I were staff assistants with a civil service staff aide. That was our little group, across the hall from the assistant secretary's office.

The Flow of Information

Work in any senior office in the State Department is about information. The rapid and unimpeded flow of information is crucial to an operation that seeks to coordinate and manage a vast network of officers and missions. Our job was to manage the flow of information, taskings, and action requests in both directions between the assistant secretary's office and elsewhere in the State Department, including the Bureau's various offices and embassies. With as many posts as the Bureau had abroad, and the variety and intensity of the topics, the volume of cables coming in on any given day was immense. Staff assistants picked up a tall stack of cables in the morning and in the afternoon, maybe eight inches thick. One of our jobs was to sort through those cables to see what was relevant and important for front office reading. We went through it all, routed it, and made sure that insignificant cables ended up in the burn bag.

The hours were long. There were unending taskers and action assignments. We made sure actions were completed when they were supposed to. For a young officer like I was, it was valuable to see the array of topics and how they were handled. Many were in highly classified and NODIS restricted formats so that if you weren't in the pipeline, you wouldn't know about them. The job was very interesting but also clerical. We sat in an office going through paper and running up and down the hallway and stairs all day long. Still, it was a perfect job for getting as quickly as possible into the functioning of the State Department.

Q: Cables did impose a certain discipline.

CLEVERLEY: Cables imposed a certain discipline on both the writer and the reader. I immediately saw the value of Tom Fina's reporting philosophy. According to him, your subject line was all important, and the second most important item was your summary. The most important part of the summary was the first sentence. So, if you didn't provoke the reader from the very beginning, maybe they wouldn't even get through the summary. If you didn't catch the reader's eye in the first few sentences, you joined a pile of cables left unnoticed, and in the world of excess, out-of-sight, out-of-mind.

Q: What did you learn or observe or were there any significant patterns that came to your insights as a result of reading all of these cables?

CLEVERLEY: For a young officer, it was valuable to see the array of topics that made up the core of America's diplomacy with the rest of the world. Many were things that were handled only in highly classified or NODIS restricted formats so that if you weren't in the queue or in the pipeline, you wouldn't necessarily know about them. It was a broadening experience, and it was sometimes interesting to be a fly on the wall following events as they unfolded, such as the tragic assassination of the American Ambassador in Kabul.

Q: Yeah. Did it teach you anything about writing cables?

CLEVERLEY: So, it taught me that Fina was right that the idea is to get the front office of your regional Bureau to read your cable. And of course, any writing class would tell you the same thing. We always had to be on guard not to dismiss an important message just because the messenger was so poor. But perhaps that's why good reporting officers in those days tended to be rewarded with assignments and promotions.

Today's information flow may be ten times what it was then if you include emails and messages. Maybe one of the ways they've dealt with this is unfortunate. Analytical reporting no longer plays the same role, and written communications may be more operational with less thought. Analysis and think pieces were extremely valuable for the officer and the post itself because in preparing the analyses you developed contacts and expertise that helped you understand what you were seeing around you. They also kept principals back home aware of your best thinking. Already when I left the Foreign Service, I believe analytical reporting had started to wane a lot because people just didn't have time and interest.

Q: You mentioned the hours and then went on to the description of task tracking. What about the hours?

CLEVERLEY: The hours were hard. They wanted a staff assistant on duty if a DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) was in the office. The earliest DASes started coming in between six and seven in the morning, and the assistant secretary would arrive between seven and eight. Some DASes would be in the office until seven or eight o'clock in the evening. Now, this was the European Bureau. The urgency of some of our topics was often not as great as say in NEA (Near Eastern Affairs) where they had to deal with Iran and other crises in the Middle East. NEA staff assistants put in even more hours. But for us, we had to be staffed in our office between six in the morning and eight in the evening. To manage this, we staggered our hours. One assistant came in at six and went home around three; the other assistant arrived around eleven or so and stayed until eight.

The problem with staggering our schedules, it seemed to me, was continuity, because there was a middle of the day handoff each day. Sometimes you had a hot issue opening during the morning, and you were the person handling it. Suddenly in the early afternoon, you disappeared to go home, and your colleague may or may not have had enough time to prepare for the handoff. It was possible for things to slip through. So, I came up with an idea that one assistant would come in at six and stay all the way through eight in the evening and continue those hours for three and a half days or so, making 40 hours for the week. The handoff would be on the last day. The other assistant worked straight through for another three and a half days, and so on. There would be the same coverage as before with fewer changeovers.

The special assistant accepted that idea, and things worked well. It did get fatiguing sometimes after three and a half days working fourteen hours, and on top of that, the commute. But then, you had some free days to rest up, and in my case, I could let Seija get out of the house. I could be there all day.

Q: Yeah. Did you work forty hours a week or a great deal of overtime? And was the overtime compensated?

CLEVERLEY: There was no compensation for overtime, at least for us. And so yeah, by doing it the way I suggested, it narrowed the week down to around forty hours. Not less but not much more. And so, it worked out and there was no overtime to deal with.

Q: During this time that you were in the Department, the Family Liaison Office was being created. Did that make any impact or impression or difference to you and your family?

CLEVERLEY: Not really, I think it was fairly early stage. And we weren't typical transits in temporary housing or anything like that. After my family reached Washington from Finland, we lived in our old home. And frankly, I just didn't have time to get into it. I knew what was happening, and I thought it was a good idea. But it was only later when I got out into the field and learned about the CLO (Community Liaison Office) operations there that I realized what a valuable innovation it was.

Q: Did you have any awareness of the role of AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) and the early rumblings that produced the new Foreign Service Act of 1980, which was notable because among other things, it gave you a twenty percent raise right off the bat.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I did. I had worked with AFSA in Italy and was a great supporter of the association. Also, I liked the Foreign Service Act as a great improvement over the system I first experienced. Of course, in Washington, I wasn't involved in it. It was nose to the grindstone when you're working a job like that in the Department, and I was just happy to get through the day.

Helsinki, Finland 1979-1983

Q: What else happened during that year? And when did you start thinking about your move to Helsinki? Was that assignment firmed up? And how did all of that take place?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, the Helsinki assignment, as I mentioned, was fixed before I ever arrived in Washington. It was clear to everyone that I was going out in the summer of 1979. Because I knew my next assignment and the types of issues that I would be covering, I wanted to take advantage of whatever training FSI (Foreign Service Institute) might provide. My new job was diverse, beyond just economic work, and covered things I didn't know very much about. For example, one of my areas in Helsinki was to be narcotics coordinator. There was no DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) presence at post. I would also be the embassy's Science and Technology Officer. Finland was in the middle of building nuclear power plants with Russian and American technology. The nuclear fuel cycle was another course I wanted to take. There was a science and diplomacy course I thought could be useful. I wanted to take a course in area studies for Europe.

The bureau agreed to release me early for these courses that were offered over the Spring of 1979. It was also beneficial to the office. If I left the job in early March, it would facilitate an easier overlap with replacements who both were due to arrive in June. The FSI courses weren't always perfect, and some were better than others. A few years later, for example, I was not totally surprised to read that the coordinator of the European Studies course had been arrested for espionage. But some, like the nuclear fuel cycle put together at the Department of Energy, gave me a tremendous amount of technical understanding that was helpful when I got to Helsinki.

Q: How did you deal with the crosscultural language elements? You learned all of this, of course, in English. Did you have the language, the Finnish language vocabulary and updates for it? Or was that something you had to pick up once you got to post? How did that work? Or was it all cognates and all done in English in Finland.

CLEVERLEY: A lot of the Finnish vocabulary was not based on cognates because Finns tried to come up with authentic Finnish constructions after they had used cognates for a couple of years. There was no real way to tap into FSI's Finnish training that would be on that level of specialization. I just assumed that when I got the post, I would pick it up because I already spoke the language well. There were also peculiarities in the way complex concepts were put into Finnish words, and these made it easier than expected. Complex words, for example, were often made up by joining two simple words.

Q: Yeah. So, were you able to finish all of your training before you all departed for Helsinki. And how was that transfer?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, we were able to finish it all and leave as scheduled at the end of May just as school got out. The children were now in school. My predecessor had already left post, so I moved into the office and went right to work. We also learned the value of the sponsorship program because our sponsor had found us an impressive house in the Helsinki suburbs. With four kids, we needed a few bedrooms. And most housing in the city was much more cramped.

A famous Karelian textile artist named Oili Mäki had built herself a home in the Helsinki suburbs. It was a modernized version of a traditional Karelian house, with features like log walls, pine floors, a wood sauna, and everything Karelian. At the same time, it had things like a small swimming pool inside so you could jump from the sauna into the pool. She had decided to rent out the house as she expanded her next-door studio. Our sponsor Bob Turner, who worked in the Defense Attache's office, learned of the house and shepherded the contract through the management section for our family. Seija was a Karelian born in Viipuri, a nationalistic Karelian. If you want to talk about paradise, this was that for Seija: living next door to a famous Karelian artist in the woods in a house with a stone baking oven, sauna, and pool.

Cold War Finland 1979

Maybe I should take a step back for a minute to explain Finland in 1979. Finland was on the Cold War divide, just on the western side. As I mentioned earlier, Finland lost two

wars to the Soviets during World War II, and as part of the settlement with the Soviets had driven out the German divisions stationed in Finland in another bloody war (Finland's third during World War II) that burned much of Lapland.

Finland's was a devastating war experience. When it came out of these wars, the country went through a lot of soul searching. It was not occupied by the Soviet Union and was not controlled by the Soviet Union. But Finland was on the losing side, and there was a Peace Commission in Helsinki to enforce the agreement. The United States never declared war on Finland, but Britain and, of course, the Soviet Union had. The Peace Commission was made up of a few Brits and a large crowd of Russians who arrived in Finland to oversee the return to peace. It was very clear to the Finns that they were going to have to walk nimbly and carefully into the future if they wanted to maintain their sovereignty.

One of the lessons they realized they could have learned earlier was that before the Winter War began in the fall of 1939, there was a lot of talk of a greater Finland. This nationalistic talk had spilled over into what was then the Soviet Union. The Soviets had followed this nationalistic talk with suspicion.

Q: Beyond Karelia?

CLEVERLEY: There was another part of Karelia called Eastern Karelia on the Soviet side of the border. In Eastern Karelia lived Karelian-speaking people who were relatives to the Finnish Karelians and Finns, themselves. Leningrad was very close to the Finnish border, and in central Europe an expansionist Hitler was rapidly expanding Germany's military capabilities. The Russians felt a lot of insecurity on their Finnish border. It was easy for Stalin during the summer of 1939 to agree with Hitler to divide up northeastern Europe and take Finland in the process.

No Finlandization in Finland

After the war Finns realized that their security depended on allaying rather than exacerbating Soviet security concerns. President Paasikivi put together a neutrality posture that paralleled Sweden's neutrality but went farther. His successor, Urho Kekkonen, refined it. The idea was that Finland would not do anything that undermined or created a sense of instability in Finland's relations with the Soviet Union. The Paasikivi-Kekkonen line was the basis of Finland's foreign policy throughout the remainder of the Cold War.

At the time I was reporting for duty, scholars in Central Europe and the United States had developed a term they called "Finlandization." The concept of Finlandization was that a large country would exert so much influence on a small neighbor that the smaller neighbor's sovereignty would be diminished over time. But they were totally wrong about this because the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line actually enhanced Finnish sovereignty from 1946 onward. The Finland I saw in 1979 was far more confident and freer to pursue its own interests than what it was in 1946 or even the 1950s. Finlandization was more related to what was happening in the 1960s and early '70s in West Germany than in

Finland and evidences the great ignorance about Finland that persisted in Western academic circles.

Finland and NATO

Q: Does that bear any relevance or resonance with the asserted Russian claims today about their insecurities over borders and threats, historical and otherwise, as part of the conversation about Ukraine, or not really? It's a different time.

CLEVERLEY: It was a different time, but it has relevance. If you recall from Russian history, there was always a dynamic between the Russophiles, people who glorified a greater Mother Russia, and the people who were wanting to expand links and relations, like Peter the Great did, in the West. And that continued during the Soviet period and continues even today. When Russia criticizes Sweden and Finland over joining NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), the implication is that it will undermine Russia's sense of security on the Finnish-Russian border. And beyond that, Russophiles don't forget that just over 100 years ago, Finland was part of Russia.

Russian history doesn't seem to have moved on for the Russophiles. Russia seems to be the same place it was, you know, during the Cold War and even before that. As far as Finland is concerned, it was part of the Russian Empire from about 1812 until 1917. That's a hundred years. Before that, there were many times when Russia occupied some or most of Finland. It's easy for those people in Moscow to claim Finland is traditionally Russian territory.

Sweden and Finland came at NATO from slightly different perspectives. Sweden did not fight in World War II. It had some leftist parties, but it hasn't had a strong Communist political presence. But leftist elements in both countries resisted NATO because they tried to put NATO and the Warsaw Pact into the same box.

Q: Yeah. Well, whether one believes that it was or wasn't, the Left asserted equivalency.

CLEVERLEY: The Left asserted equivalency although many including more than one prime minister and president of Finland tried to be subtle about the meritless thought. A poll taken just before the Ukrainian crisis, showed that only a small percentage of Finns wanted to join NATO. Of course, the numbers reversed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It might be that Russia will be so depleted by the time the Ukrainian war is over, it may not pose an immediate threat to Finland. But the Finns cannot bank on that. They have a long border, and they don't want to overlook the legitimate concerns the Russians might have, like they seemed to have done during the 1930s. They still think that way. The Finns also know that in 1939, they were alone, as they were throughout the Cold War. It was hard to imagine NATO coming to rescue Finland unless the country is a member of the alliance. Membership in NATO will change all those calculations, depending, of course, on the health and credibility of the alliance.

Q: Well, it remains to be seen what's going to happen in Ukraine. But we do know that if they're not members of NATO, that they will be alone. That's hard. It's going to be a fascinating element of this whole moment in history that is upending a lot of applect and 20th century civilization. So, back to the Helsinki of your assignment, that was a very important context. And you were going as an economic officer. So, what did that mean?

Cold War Finland and the United States

CLEVERLEY: I'm sorry to spend so much time on context, but bear with me still a minute. The context explains very much my next assignment and its accomplishments. There were two elements in Finland's relationship with the two superpowers. One was maintaining credibility with Russia. At the same time, there was a powerful leftist attitude toward the United States. The United States was targeted in the media continually because the media was controlled by the Left. There were regular demonstrations in front of the American Embassy by leftist groups. When I arrived, Vietnam was over, but there were always things to demonstrate about.

Just an illustration of this: On my second tour of Finland, a few years later, I met a member of parliament at a reception USIS (United States Information Service) was holding. I remembered his name from my first tour in Finland, Jaakko Laakso. He was an editor of an extreme-left Finnish communist newspaper and on the left of the Left. When we chatted, he told me that this was his first time at an American embassy reception. "A lot of things have changed since those days," I said. "Many of us have changed a lot, too," he responded with a half-smile.

Laakso then recounted a story of an event that happened when I was earlier serving in Helsinki, on the tour we are now discussing. One day, he was leading a big demonstration against the American embassy. When they got outside the chancery, they had a manifesto they wanted to leave. He asked if someone from the embassy would accept it. The consular officer was the only officer available and was asked to collect the manifesto. He came out, took the paper, and left. The demonstration was over, and everybody went home, except Laakso. He told me he couldn't go home yet because he had applied for a visa to go to the United States. So, he had to go to the consulate to collect his passport, and there was the same consular officer waiting to discuss his visa.

It occurred to me that this deep ideologue from the past had maneuvered well through the collapse of the Soviet Union and political changes in Finland, always in search of new opportunities to be heard. His was a dramatic example of this opportunism, but his story was far from unique. Many America-bashing Cold War leftists became good chums with the United States by the time I reached Finland on my second tour in the mid-1990s.

In the early 1980s, however, the relationship with the United States was complex. Many Finns were western in their orientation, and they admired the United States for many reasons. But they believed they couldn't have a normal political relationship with the United States which might perceptibly violate the assumed terms of the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line. This meant minimal military interface and little cooperation

with the United States on some mainstream types of political issues. First, they didn't want to alienate the Soviets. But second, they didn't want the Soviets to ask for some type of reciprocal arrangement to something Finland was doing with the United States. That's how the Cold War played out in Finland, in a way that sometimes dramatically affected embassy operations and my job, too.

American Embassy Helsinki 1979

When I arrived, the post had about fifty-five Americans. It was therefore not a very large post. It had three locations: two buildings next to each other and another downtown in a rented business suite that housed the USIS library and their operations.

Among the things Washington really wanted in Helsinki was a valuable watching post to keep an eye on the Soviet Union. Washington was interested in supporting Finland's neutrality and western aspirations. Helsinki was also a neutral venue for US-USSR dialogues and meetings. In those days, it was not uncommon for US presidents to meet in Helsinki with Soviet counterparts. And then, of course, Finland had been a neutral venue for the negotiation of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) agreements.

As far as the political parties were concerned, we had a no-talk policy with the Communist Party. The Communist Party participated relatively constructively in the government, but we didn't talk to them. We talked to the social democrats on the left, and with other parties. One last thing, President Kekkonen had been president for 23 years, from 1956, and bolstered his position by claiming he was the only politician in Finland whom the Russians would accept—and therefore it was imperative for Finland to keep him in office.

Q: Yes.

CLEVERLEY: I was an economic officer, environment, science, and technology officer, and narcotics coordinator. There were two officers in the economic section. Our commercial section had one officer, and I filled in as back-up whenever that officer was absent. The consular section also had only one officer, and I was back-up there, too. The political section had two officers. USIS, with five Americans, drew on me regularly for representational presentations due to my fluency in Finnish. And then, of course, the ambassador, DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) and a very large Defense Attaché (DAO) operation plus other personnel.

Not long after arriving I was promoted to an 0-5 (today's 0-3) position. But I was still one of the most junior people on the staff. When I corresponded with my predecessor about the job, he wrote back, "Your job will be the trash can of the embassy." What he meant by that was anything no one else wanted would come to my desk. It was a joke, but basically true.

Q: Yeah. But it prepared you for years to come in terms of the issues that you had to handle and get used to, I bet, including science and technology and nuclear fuel and all that kind of stuff. Drugs. You know, drugs became very big.

It was a very big opportunity for a young officer to take on so many different issues. The section chief really didn't care about the narcotics coordinator and the science/technology officer stuff. I had a portfolio there on each of these subjects, pretty much on my own. That's hard to do as a younger officer. In a big embassy, a junior officer job may be about two inches wide sometimes. There are so many officers doing many different types of things.

Q: And they gave you an excuse to call on a much broader range of people like that.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, that's right, at all levels. On these topics, I had great access to people at all levels. I also had a straight economic job, of course, where I was mainly responsible for Finnish-Soviet economic and trade relations and energy plus the 101 different taskers that came from Washington every week. The Finnish-Soviet economic and trade relationship, I knew, could be interesting in Washington if it gave an insight into what was happening in the Soviet Union. I zeroed in on that. My first chief of section had an alcohol problem and was sometimes incapacitated enough to hinder his work. The more initiative and responsibility I assumed, the happier he was. His successor, Leo Cecchini, arrived a year later. Leo was extremely flexible and supported me in whatever direction I took in my work.

Q: What about energy, which is a very big topic today but never loomed that large in the past.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, there was a lot of Washington interest in energy. These were the days of soaring Middle Eastern oil dominance and the long lines of cars waiting for gas pumps across the United States. The Finns were always trying to balance the West and the East in their energy policy, and when they decided to build nuclear power reactors, they bought Russian technology for one, and America Westinghouse technology for the other. Washington was also interested in what was going on internationally with nuclear power: it was a big commercial opportunity, but more than that, a Soviet-built reactor that was reasonably accessible outside the USSR, was something to follow. The Finnish facility used the same technology as Chernobyl, but the Finns altered the technology to build safety features that were never put into Chernobyl.

Finland's Lucrative Cold War Soviet Trade

After World War II, the Soviet Union levied Finland with reparations so large that there was a question whether the Finns would ever be able to meet the schedule. They all had to be paid by 1952, not in currency but in finished products. And the Russians chose products that the Finns were not traditionally producing. So, Finland had to build the factories to build the products to pay the Russians the reparations. The Finns were determined to meet the deadline, but it was painful. My father-in-law told me that during

those years he would often go to work and sleep in the factory. The pressure was so great that workers spent long hours producing the required products.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: But they did it, and they met the schedule. And what they had in the end were some big new factories that industrialized the economy. They produced iron and steel products including machines and tools. They started building paper machines that were exportable to the West, too. A big furniture industry developed, clothing factories, things like that. The Finns succeeded and met the schedule. What they had at the end were big new industries that industrialized the economy.

Following payment of the reparations, Finland and Russia put together a barter trade relationship. No currency had to be exchanged. The Russians would export crude oil to Finland, and the Finns would export to the Russians the same types of things they had started building to pay the reparations. In those years of the Cold War, it was a good relationship for both parties. It economically pulled Finland up by the bootstraps. Most of Finland's oil needs were being supplied by the Soviet Union. At the same time, the Finns were able to sell products from these new factories to Russia, often at prices they would not have got in Western markets.

Q: And that laid the basis for Nokia.

Then there was Nokia, making rubber tires, lumber, paper, and then paper machines – and finally, electronics. I was there when a Nokia manager had the great idea of getting into electronics. He and his colleagues invited the head of the economic section, Leo Cecchini, and me one evening to a sauna party where they told us what they were doing. It sounded fantastic, but I couldn't imagine a rubber company selling something like electronic displays to the United States. This was about 1981 or 1982.

The barter relationship revealed much about the Soviet economy—and about the Finnish economy, as well. I started doing a series of reporting on the trade relationship and how it was enriching Finns. This didn't fit into the commonly held perception that the Russians were exploiting the Finns. It was reaching the point where the Finns were exploiting the Russians, selling industrial products at a high price in return for oil.

Q: Finns were exploiting the Russians, I was going to say. That's the way I would read it.

Ambassador Rozanne Ridgway

CLEVERLEY: That's correct. I will just say something about the three ambassadors I was lucky to serve under. The first one was Rozanne Ridgway, the second was James Goodby, and the third, Keith Nyborg.

Q: Wow, boy. Did you have some very important names to work for?

CLEVERLEY: I did, I was lucky. Rozanne Ridgway, in terms of overall quality, has to be among the best ambassadors I worked for. I wrote an article about what makes a good ambassador for the *Foreign Service Journal* several years ago, after having been a DCM three times. I mentioned three things: being a very good manager as the head of a complex team; conducting a people-to-people relationship through getting people to identify positively with the United States; and being an expert on substance and knowing how to discuss, handle, and analyze events and policy issues.

I knew many ambassadors who were very good at one or two of these, but I didn't know many who were exceptional at all three. Rozanne Ridgway was perfect at all three. After we'd been at post only a few months, she knew the names of our children. She was great with the staff and ran a tight embassy. She was an excellent manager and perfect in her outreach. She said, "I'm the only American ambassador who has waltzed with the Finnish Prime Minister." The Finns like to dance, and she took advantage of that. She was sharp as a knife on substantive issues in our relations. She was an outstanding ambassador but was only in Helsinki for less than a year after we arrived before she departed to be Counselor in the Department.

Q: All three, yeah

Ambassador James Goodby

CLEVERLEY: James Goodby took her place. I knew Ambassador Goodby before he came to Finland, and I've known him ever since. We often see each other. He was a DAS in the European Bureau when I was there as a staff assistant. When he was nominated ambassador to Finland, I was delighted because he was genuinely an outstanding individual and officer.

Q: I'm a big fan of his. We've been working on getting—he was very close to Schultz, as you probably know. And we were working with George and with Hoover before Schultz's passing and still trying, but I think it's not going to go anywhere, to get FSI renamed from the National Foreign Affairs Training Center—which is unmemorable, unexplanatory and the wrong concept—to the George P. Shultz School of Diplomacy, Leadership and Management. Something that George was very much in favor of doing.

CLEVERLEY: Wow, that's great.

Q: You know, we'd set it up for revising the curriculum and then eventually, maybe turning it into a serious school that could be accredited, but it's probably never going to go anywhere, but that's Jim.

CLEVERLEY: When I first met Ambassador Goodby at post, he knew that I had some Finnish background and asked about the traditional Finnish sauna bath. He wondered whether it was good for health. Before he left Washington, his physician told him the sauna was bad for you. I replied by inviting him to our house one evening for sauna with a few senior FSN (Foreign Service Nationals) so that they could have a chance to meet him. His verdict after the sauna: "Mike, this was great!"

Q: And the word spread very quickly.

CLEVERLEY: A few days later, Jim told me, “I hear there's a Finnish Sauna Society in this town.” I said I had heard about it, too, and promised to see what more I could find out. I managed to get him invited to the sauna society by the president of the society and the president of the International Sauna Society. They were happy to host the new ambassador. That evening, the Sauna Society was open only for us from the embassy.

It was March, and the Sauna Society was built right on the Gulf of Finland. Normally, in the summer, you run out of the sauna and jump into the water. Well, it was March, and there was still ice floating in the water. Before the sauna, one of our hosts, a cardiac surgeon, told us that they had studied whether the sauna is good or bad for health, and the studies suggested that it was neither physically, but aesthetically and emotionally it was very good because it relaxed you a lot. The only exception, he said, was if you jump from a hot sauna into cold water without waiting a few minutes. It could cause a heart attack.

I repeated this to Ambassador Goodby because I saw he was already quite enthusiastic. He should wait a couple minutes before jumping into that very cold water. Jim didn't need to wait, and simply dove into the icy sea. Fortunately, he survived. I thought, look I'm the escort officer here. It was something I didn't want to do, but I followed him into the Gulf of Finland. Instant freezing. I thought I was paralyzed. Somehow, I survived, too.

Q: Did you all take your sauna in the buff or US style?

CLEVERLEY: No, no, there is no US style in Finland—running out there without a swimming suit is all that qualifies, especially at the Finnish Sauna Society. Of course, it was night, not daytime. Finns do this day and night, but nighttime was fine for us Americans.

Jim Goodby was ambassador during the election of Ronald Reagan, and the embassy had planned an early morning breakfast with journalists on election morning. Because he had agreed to talk to the journalists about what the election meant, he woke up at about five o'clock. When he called the press attaché who was organizing the breakfast, he learned the election was already called for Reagan. Ambassador Goodby said, “I'm going back to sleep, and hung up.” He didn't show up.

Years later when I was *chargé (chargé d'affaires)* in Helsinki, the Finns were commemorating the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), which was agreed in Helsinki in 1975, with a conference. Many principals who were instrumental in the CSCE negotiation were there, including James Goodby. I hosted a luncheon before the event with the Russian, the Finnish, and the American delegations. Over lunch I asked a question, “Now we are looking back at the CSCE but also at the fall of the Soviet Union. What do you think was the biggest reason for that?” The CSCE was on all their minds. During the ensuing conversation, Ambassador Goodby mentioned

something about Reagan and some of the policies Reagan had followed. It was a good humored conversation, so I didn't feel reluctant to remind him of this election breakfast and mentioned that he had once said, "Nothing good would ever come in East-West relations as long as Reagan is president." I asked how he felt about that today. And he said with a smile and chuckle, "I feel like I was totally wrong." This was just another example of the deep level of honesty and insight that characterized Ambassador Goodby.

Q: Yeah, no. He's a very—he's a wonderful, intellectually honest person of enormous integrity. I wanted to, you mentioned CSCE in your context for Finland, and I wanted you to remind people what it is, how and why Helsinki became the center for it because it still bears some relevance today. But most people have never heard of it. And you say OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and they don't know what you're talking about either. So, take us back to the earlier days and how, what was your relationship with that process?

CSCE - Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Accords)

CLEVERLEY: In the early '70s, Finland had suggested international talks about ways to lessen tensions between East and West Europe. It fit well with the Finns' neutrality position to make a proposal like this. Both sides accepted, and Russian and American diplomats met in Finland to discuss a range of issues. A document was signed in 1975, a few years before I arrived in Helsinki.

The CSCE process started in Helsinki continued and eventually evolved into an organization called the OSCE, or Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The agreement not only served to lower tensions in East-West relations but took the cork off the Soviet Union's repressive human rights regime, allowing mounting dissent to grow ever stronger under Gorbachev. James Goodby was one of the principal negotiators, as well as several other American diplomats, who became well known later on.

Ten years after the signing I was in London, and there was a large event in Helsinki to commemorate the anniversary of CSCE. I was seconded there to support the American delegation and ended up one afternoon filling a seat on the stage when the United States was chairing one of the plenaries. I was up front because they wanted to keep our senior people together. I was simply an American placeholder and sat right behind the podium. When the new Russian Foreign Minister Shevardnadze (under Gorbachev) got up and started speaking, he was televised around the world, with my face right behind his in front of the television camera. People all over who knew me, including my boss back in London, wondered what I was doing there.

Q: And then it has had more recently, and specifically in Ukraine, a monitoring function

CLEVERLEY: It has had, and also in the Balkans before that. So, it's still a very live organization. It's just one that I think most Americans don't know much about. Certainly, many Europeans do.

Ambassador Keith Nyborg

Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 and a few months later started granting ambassadorships. Jim Goodby had not even been a year at post when some friends in Idaho got in touch with us to say there was a new ambassador to Finland. It had been in the local newspaper that Keith Nyborg, who owned a ranch named the Finlandia Ranch on the border of Yellowstone Park had been asked to be the new US ambassador to Finland. I was surprised because no one at the embassy had heard anything about it. We knew Keith Nyborg and his wife, Raija, well. They were even at our wedding. Raija was born in Karelia like Seija.

I wasn't sure whether Ambassador Goodby knew about this and asked one of our communications people if there had been any cables about a new ambassador. I didn't want details, I said, just to know whether the ambassador was aware of the possibility of a new ambassador. There had been no cable traffic on that subject, and I decided I should tell him what I had heard. I sought an appointment and explained that I didn't think this was just a rumor. It had been in a local Idaho newspaper that normally would not have carried news like this. I added that I knew Keith Nyborg. He was not a professional but a political appointment. Keith spoke Finnish fluently and his wife was Finnish.

Of course, it was a great disappointment to Ambassador Goodby, and I felt terrible conveying the bad news. He was someone who so energetically had just begun his new ambassadorship. That was just in the beginning of a new administration whose transition people were vindictive and didn't want anything to do with Jimmy Carter's administration.

Q: You know, we experienced the same thing in Rome.

CLEVERLEY: Were you in Rome at that time?

Q: Yeah.

CLEVERLEY: Who was the Ambassador then?

Q: Richard Gardner.

CLEVERLEY: Yes. I remember Richard Gardner and his wife.

Q: Yes.

CLEVERLEY: About that time, we were going on home leave. It was June of 1981. I had extended my assignment and was now on a four-year tour. During our home leave, we saw my parents in Idaho, while there, we visited the Nyborgs' ranch. They explained how Reagan had personally called to ask him to be the ambassador to Finland.

Q: Yeah, you don't say no.

CLEVERLEY: There was kind of a backstory to this. I was just curious how anyone in the Reagan administration knew anybody in the mountains of Idaho. What I learned while in Idaho was that the nomination was born in the Idaho Senate race. There was a prominent Idaho Senator named Frank Church, a democrat who during the 1960s and 1970s was active in Washington and served as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Church was challenged in the 1980 election by Steve Symms. One of the points that Church made during his campaign was that he was already in Washington with an important committee assignment and could do more for Idahoans than anyone else. But he lost. I think Symms wanted to show Idahoans that he, too, could have some clout in Foreign Affairs and picked up on Nyborg, got some other western Republican senators to join him, and called the White House.

Q: It must have been a relief and a welcome to him that he actually knew somebody at post. The fact that he had been at your wedding and that you all knew each other made a difference when he arrived?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, Keith hoped for my support at post because he really didn't know much about foreign affairs in general or the State Department. Of course, they had orientation courses and things like that, and he was smart. He also knew a lot about Finland, and probably understood the dynamic of Finland's position better than many people in the embassy.

Q: And he spoke the language and was married to a Finn.

CLEVERLEY: He read the magazines and everything. The fact that he spoke Finnish made him better in the people-to-people category than most ambassadors I knew. He was out all the time, talking to people in their own language. Once I met the chairman of the city council of Kuopio, a city in mid-Finland. He told me, "You know, your ambassador came to visit our city. I don't speak English, and I had my first conversation with an American or American ambassador, and it was tremendous." Even on a political level, he was a hit because people liked to be able to speak and talk to someone who spoke their language.

Q: Yeah, and spoke it well.

CLEVERLEY: I recommended different things for him to do, especially in terms of city visits. He knew Helsinki and knew the big picture. The "small picture" was not always so clear. He asked my advice, and I often accompanied him on trips as an escort officer. There was one thing he did on a substantive level that I thought was important. We had a no-talk policy, as I mentioned, with the Communist Party. He thought that was wrong and that we should be talking to them because the party could wield a hefty share of the vote. We should at least be talking. And he got a green light for that.

One evening he invited the chairman of the Finnish Communist Party to a reception at his residence. When he arrived, he said, "It's a nice residence, your house." Keith asked him

if he would like to see the other floors and gave him a tour. When they came down the stairs, the man turned to Ambassador Nyborg and said, "I built these stairs. Back in the '30s, when you were building this embassy, I was working on the stairs."

Q: Oh, wow. Interesting.

CLEVERLEY: I mean, it wasn't like everything was suddenly hunky-dory. The idea was to not be adversaries within the dialogue we carried on with Finland.

Q: There was a connection. No, I was interested when you said that there was a no talk policy versus the Communist Party when you arrived, because Gardner had been sent to Italy explicitly with Carter's instructions to open relations with the Communist Party in Italy, and I thought I found it interesting that that had not changed in Finland.

CLEVERLEY: I don't know why it hadn't. It was just a relic, I think.

Q: Probably, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: Maybe no ambassador wanted to take it on. I think in the early 1950s, the communists were remnants of a bloody civil war, only twenty-five years before. Also, they got a lot of Russian support when the Soviet Peace Commission was still in Helsinki. I do believe that the Soviets wanted to bring Finland in as a satellite as was happening elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The Soviets couldn't get the same traction in Finland, perhaps because the communists, after all, were on the losing side of the civil war. But they did end up putting leftists and communists into many parts of the system.

Q: I don't know. I don't remember that part. It was just for the longest time that was standing. And it was beginning to look silly, particularly with Eurocommunists. You know, they weren't Maoists. They weren't Soviets. In Italy, they were largely refugees from the Catholic—they were anti-clerics more than anything else, or anti-Christian Democratic Party, which was also very corrupt. But how did they control roughly twenty percent of the vote in Finland? What was the character? Did they work—you said that the left commanded or controlled the media. Was that significantly part of the Communist Party's working of the intelligentsia and winning hearts and minds as it were?

CLEVERLEY: And there was also this *intelligentsia* thing. In those days, as you went into the '60s especially, being on the left was the chic thing to be. Banging away on the United States' door was always popular among those types of groups. The Left spent a lot of effort to keep the cultural establishment on the left side of the spectrum in many parts of Europe and especially in Finland. It was a popular thing, I think, among actors in the dramatic and media communities. In a capitalist society, there was no easy way to fund culture except through admissions, and only wealthier people could afford to go to the opera. When La Scala in Milano had its opening, you would see all these people showing up in limousines while across the street the Left was demonstrating because they thought the Scala was an institution for the rich.

Q: Yeah, students in universities, particularly. Was Gramsci at all a recognized name or part of the understanding of the left in Finland—the way he was an Italian communist and his strategy and his theory was through culture. He was an author and widely read in Italy and in leftist circles in Italy and supported but that doesn't seem to have gravitated north?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I am sure that the Finnish communists knew him and were influenced by him, because there was a lot of effort to keep the cultural establishment on the left side of the spectrum. It was also commonly felt in Finland, that unless the State provided cultural subsidies, culture would not be available to ordinary people. The Social Democrats were able to deal with that by providing government funding for cultural centers, opera halls, and so forth, making events more accessible.

Q: More collective.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, and of course, the Russians liked that too because they were competing with us on culture: “Who is greater than the Bolshoi and our Olympic team?”

Q: Yeah, exactly. Now, Gramsci died in '37 but he was the name in Italy through which one—or the lens through which one interpreted and argued and debated about Eurocommunism. Interesting.

Finding Finnish American Cooperation in the 1980s

CLEVERLEY: This gets me back to where I was going earlier when laying out the context of Finland's relations with the United States. When I arrived in the late 1970s, my impression was that there might be a lot of opportunity for official interaction on a cultural front in spite of Finnish reservations about official Finnish American cooperation. Here I'm defining culture broadly to include things like science and technology. I had this idea that if the thrust of Finland's foreign policy did not allow us, the United States, to cooperate with them in military or some political areas, could we cooperate in others that did not seem threatening to the Soviets? In fact, I sensed a desire to have more going on with the United States.

Science, technology, and environment were perfect areas for this. Everything is political, but you know, not always with a capital P. When I arrived, there were several areas where we had had some formal discussions. I thought, if those could be wrapped up into formal agreements, we could sign a series of agreements between Finland and the United States that would enhance our cooperation in ways that had not happened since World War II. Wearing my ES&T hat, I got the ambassador on board. He liked what I thought we could do. It started with Ambassador Goodby and continued through the Keith Nyborg years.

I never explicitly discussed this with Finnish counterparts who had no bureaucratic latitude to discuss such an idea with us—if you don't want an official answer, don't ask the question (officially). But we found they were immediately proactive and cooperative. During the four years I was there, we signed agreements with the Department of Energy,

the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Health and Human Services and their Finnish counterparts. And then we made less formal arrangements with the University of Alaska for cooperation in arctic research, with the US National Forest Service, and the US Coast Guard in the field of ice-breaking technology. We made some connections with the US Winter Olympic Committee, and I was able to bring to Finland a famous American cross-country skier. There weren't many of them in those days, but he had won an Olympic silver medal.

And then on the Nobel Prize winner level, and this was originally Rozanne Ridgway's initiative, we convinced many laureates to come to Helsinki from Stockholm after picking up their prize. Over my four years in Helsinki, we hosted American Nobel Prize winners in chemistry, physics, medicine, and economics. It was always a good thing for the Finns, because they were able to interact with us openly and freely. Somewhere we found money to fund their travel to Helsinki, often from the National Science Foundation, and their Finnish counterparts would host their programs in Finland.

Q: Oh, yeah, no, in a very rich, broad, you know, huge number of new areas of contact, because those personal contacts sometimes live on as well.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, they did. And it was sometimes colorful for the American laureates to come to Finland. One time, I contacted the Finnish Chemistry Society to say we had an American chemist coming to Stockholm to receive his award, and he would be willing to come to Finland if they could put together a program for him and his wife. The Finns were excited and sent a draft of the program over that among other things had a sauna evening. When I sent it to the American organizers, I got the response: "Question here, two questions: Does my wife participate in the sauna? And do we wear clothes?" I replied this was a very common form of representation in Finland. It's an honor when they invite you to sauna. Women and men would have separate programs. And no, you don't wear clothes. They loved the entire experience, of course.

Within the S&T agreement, the National Science Foundation and Finns put together different working parties in several areas of cooperation where scientists worked directly with each other and networked. I attended one of their meetings on the 70th parallel, about the same latitude as Barrow, Alaska, right on the northern tip of Finland. There was a Finnish arctic research station there. It was hard to get to, especially in the winter. In the summer, you could fly by plane and land on the lake. These were physicists who were interested in the *aurora borealis* and things taking place in the ionosphere.

Q: Up by Rovaniemi.

CLEVERLEY: About five degrees latitude, 270 miles, north of Rovaniemi which sits on the Arctic Circle.

Q: Yeah, really above the Arctic Circle.

CLEVERLEY: I received a Meritorious Honor Award for these initiatives. I had never heard of anyone getting an award because they didn't seem to grant them so often in those days. The DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), Sam Fry, gave me the certificate saying he was not in favor of it. But the ambassador was, and my section chief Leo Cecchini nominated me for it. Fry said, "Here's the certificate. I have worked for the Foreign Service for twenty-five years and never got an award," and then walked out of my office. Especially for that reason, I guess, I always valued this award. I received many different awards over my career, but this one has always been the most meaningful for me. It was for something that was worth doing. And it was nice to be recognized for having done it.

Q: Yeah, no, absolutely. And it sounds particularly, working with three different ambassadors and in a very important moment in terms of relation evolution, that they had found the right person to be there and help. Did you do anything in the area of environment? Because Finland, in my experience, has a natural green instinct. Was that, did that manifest itself at all? Were there things in that area that the embassy got into while you were there or did that come later?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, we did actually. We put something together with the United States Forest Service and its Finnish counterpart.

Q: That would make sense. And again, non-threatening.

CLEVERLEY: Really non-threatening, and we brought over two deputy chiefs of the US Forest Service, and I traveled around Finland with them for nearly a week. They ended up arranging to cooperate with their Finnish counterparts in forestry and preserving the forests. Finland's forests remained for the most part private. Farmers own the forests, whereas pretty much of our forests are public lands. So, husbandry in a Finnish forest is different than in America. But with the vast forests we both had, there was plenty to talk about and learn.

Q: Yeah. Well, coming to sustainable forest management, naturally and of necessity, they had, I'm sure, a number of insights and lessons they could have taught us.

CLEVERLEY: Well, they did. Our forestry people were happy. I kind of have to say I smiled, when our former president said that the Finnish president had told him that the reason they don't have forest fires in Finland is because they "sweep" the forests. The Finnish president denied saying that, by the way. Having spent a week traveling around Finland with these Forest Service chiefs, I saw how much basic forest husbandry was involved in keeping Finnish forest healthy and productive. But a big reason they don't have the problem with forest fires we do, is because Nordic forests are damp and cool, as opposed to the dry, hot forests of the western United States.

Q: Yeah, no, and it's absolutely true.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, and the Coast Guard. With the United States Coast Guard, we got an agreement sharing icebreaker technology. Icebreaking was a big thing on our Great

Lakes, as well as for Finland where the Baltic freezes in the winter. The United States Coast Guard straddled the line between military and civil tasks. In this case, the Coast Guard was just enough on the civil side for the Finns to feel comfortable working with us.

The Value of Language Training

In all this, it helped that I spoke Finnish. When I came to the embassy, I probably spoke Finnish better than anybody there on the American embassy staff. I saw how many officers who went through the FSI training for forty-four weeks often spoke better Finnish the day they arrived than the day they left. That was mainly because their contacts in Helsinki spoke English very well, and they weren't really using the language.

When you have a hard language that takes forty-four weeks to learn, and yet the officers aren't learning it very well, that raises the question: should we have training at all? Would it be better to just rely on your national employees for Finnish tasks and speak English with your contacts? I've always opposed that idea. When I arrived as DCM on my second tour in Helsinki, there was an inspection report with a still outstanding recommendation to do away with language designated positions at the embassy. It seemed to me that we badly needed Finnish among some officers for translation and interpretation purposes. I have seen many times, and not just in Finland, that in the interpretation process where you have a national employee as interpreter, there are easily interpretations that are not exact.

Q: Yeah. Well, and even, you know, that's an obvious one. But neither in my experience in the Baltics—and this was Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, as well as the Baltic states, but especially Denmark—everybody speaks English. But that's not where they live and think and feel. It's an artificial language. I came to look at it as you in language or you in English. You in English is a tool of its own ilk and breed. And it is no more natural to Americans and authentic to Americans than it is to the people who are using it as a tool. I think that's what you're speaking to.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, that's right. You might have an interpreter who speaks English very well, but they interpret as they understand the words with their English. Any vested interest in the subject can affect how they hear the phrase, or the “twist” they put on the interpretation. On the American side, if we don't have an American who understands both sides of the interpretation, we are not necessarily able to correct the interpreter. And I have corrected interpreters, especially national employees, who had their own thoughts about what they had been working on and interpreted based on their own thoughts. We don't want or need our diplomatic conversations done based on the interpreter's views of the issue, rather than our own.

Q: Or they would try to facilitate a nice conversation. If they were blunt and literal like they should be, it might not turn out that way.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. And then there was the issue of translation of the media. If your officers can't understand TV news and read the newspaper only through the translation that your own staff gives, you don't know whether you're actually getting your staff's interpretation, or whether that exactly is what was said or written? What might have been left out of the daily news summary? Or you may even get a lot of the peripheral stuff not relevant to the key issues you might be following.

During this assignment in Finland, I listened to a radio station every morning. They would regularly blast the United States during the broadcast. Really ugly stuff. Even Donald Duck took hits for his evil capitalist mindset. I don't think anybody else in the embassy even knew about it. In their daily news summaries, the national employees never brought it up. So, one day I complained to Finnish officials who were well connected. Surprisingly, the anti-American tone of the show stopped. Evidently the Finnish government did not want to embarrass the American Embassy.

Sometimes, there is simply an unexpected need for an embassy official who is fluent in the language. Again, I was lucky because I spoke the language, and it made it possible to intervene or to do things which would not have otherwise been possible. One time, we had a fire in the embassy, in the communications section. Fire trucks showed up, with all the employees standing across the street, smoke coming out through one of the windows. And there was nobody there who could talk to the fire brigade because those guys didn't speak English. And so, I came forward and even though it wasn't my job, I started coordinating what was going on. Somebody had to do it. It was possible for me to play a role that was useful for the embassy.

USIS used me a lot as a speaker in events because quite often, there were venues where many did not speak English well. They needed somebody to speak Finnish. One of these was the Finnish American Society that then was a large organization with chapters in every city promoting good relations with the United States. They had monthly meetings, annual America days, and all kinds of events where having an American speaking Finnish generated a lot of good will.

Q: Did you travel a lot around Finland as a result of your language facility?

The Sami

CLEVERLEY: Like I learned in Milan during my first assignment, I made my own trips and city visits around Finland. One trip I made was to Lapland. I never saw evidence of anyone from the embassy going to Lapland. The indigenous people there were the Sámi, who seemed separated from Finland and had their own culture. So, I traveled to the far north and called on local Sámi leaders. They were totally delighted. This was the first time they could remember when they had met anyone from the American Embassy. The head of the Sámi association took me everywhere, showed me everything, the reindeer, how they lived. They wanted me to go to their museum and get a sense of their culture. They weren't English speakers, and we spoke Finnish together. They had their own language, Sámi, that was similar to Finnish. This trip was the only time in Finland I ever

felt followed. A young, policeman-looking guy kept showing up at a neighboring table and elsewhere. I wondered whether the Finns were curious about why someone from the American Embassy cared to make calls on the Sami. Maybe it was my imagination, but I did know what undercover police looked like. I was working with a lot of them in my narcotics coordinator job.

When Ambassador Nyborg arrived, I suggested he travel to Lapland to meet the Sámi people and leaders, especially since he was a rancher and had raised livestock his entire life. He agreed, and it became one of his early trips. He decided to travel with Raija and invited Seija and me to join them. We flew to a town called Rovaniemi on the Arctic Circle, made some calls, and then drove north another 275 miles to spend the night at the Kevo research station where I had earlier visited with American physicists. The Sámi were impressed. When we got to Kevo, the director, Professor Paavo Kallio, said that the station had been getting phone calls all day from Sami families along the road telling them the American Ambassador had now passed their home. Everyone was following our travel.

Of course, one of the big things among the Sámi people was the reindeer roundup. Once a year, they brought the reindeer in and rounded them up in corrals. We had timed our trip to correspond with the roundup. They used a type of lasso. It was a little different from an American lasso, smaller rope, and not so stiff. It was also harder to handle than the American lasso. When you threw it, you didn't try to hook the horns, American cowboy-style. If you're doing it properly, you catch the reindeer on the front hoof. That's a really hard thing to do. Ambassador Nyborg threw that thing and got it on a hoof the first time. Keith told me afterwards, he was as surprised as we were, because it was just luck. But to the Sámi, that was cool.

Q: That was totally, totally cool. The Americans can't be all bad. Was there any awareness, political awareness of the Soviet Union and the frictions and fractures and politics of the era? Or had they been able to live sufficiently removed from that?

CLEVERLEY: I think they were pretty much removed from it. They weren't as well integrated into society as we would have thought.

Q: When you went back, had the Arctic Council been established? By the time you went back and were the indigenous people and the Sámi, in particular, more politically engaged then than when you first arrived? Or could you, did you have an opportunity to assess?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, during my second tour, the Arctic Council was functioning. And I did feel like this process of integration had gone forward, more than it had in the past.

Q: We can do sort of a wrap up on your first tour in Finland, and then move on to university training. I would be very interested to hear what your year in Cambridge was like and I assume you were resident?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, we were.

Q: Maybe we can even get to London next time but think about how you want to both complement what you've already related and summed up. What you took away both as an officer, as a diplomat and personally, from the tour in Helsinki.

Q: This is Stephanie Kinney, on March 4, 2022, conducting an oral history, continuing oral history interview with Mike Cleverley. When we finished the last session, he and his family were still in Helsinki, towards the end of a tour that was rich in outstanding ambassadors, opportunities, and accomplishments.

So, Michael, is there anything that you want to add to what you related last session about Helsinki? Any important points, any takeaways or summary? And then, tell us how you got from Helsinki to Harvard? What was it that made that possible? What was it that made you interested in taking the opportunity? And then, let's talk about Harvard, the JFK [John F. Kennedy School of Government] experience.

International Schools and the Embassy

CLEVERLEY: Okay, there are a couple of things still, I would mention about our experience in Helsinki. As anyone who has worked abroad in an embassy knows, international schools are an essential part of the embassy environment. In the very beginning of my tour, I realized I needed to participate in the international school, not just because we had several children there, but because the embassy had a need for proper schooling in order to keep the post staffed properly. Finnish was such a difficult and rare language, and it wasn't something that a lot of parents thought their children needed to learn. So, the idea of sending their children to a Finnish school was not a popular one.

Q. What school was used? Did you have an American school there?

CLEVERLEY: The International School of Helsinki went through the sixth grade. A British Headmaster dominated the school and was influenced a great deal by the British parents. It wasn't very large, maybe sixty kids or something like that, kindergarten through sixth grade. The first fall that I was there, I ran for the school board and spent four years on the school board. During the last three, I was the chairman of the board. The objective we Americans had was to expand the school curriculum up to and including the eighth grade. That would make it a lot more attractive to potential bidders for jobs at the embassy. Because the embassy was small, many of the applicants for jobs were also relatively young and had children.

The other thing we wanted was to see if we could get the school accredited: we were interested in deepening what was happening at the school. We had two in mind, the New England and the Mid-Atlantic associations. We went back to the Office of Overseas Schools at the State Department and got grants to bring out people from those

associations to look at our school. The process eventually led to many valuable changes that led to being accredited by both associations. We decided to expand, increased tuition, and sought grants from the Department to pay for it. We hired an American deputy headmaster and added two or three full-time and some part-time teachers, as well as local teachers who could teach a specific subject like eighth-grade math. We started an accreditation process that eventually led to being accredited by both associations. We replaced the British headmaster when his contract ended with an American.

One of the problems in administering an international school is that different groups of parents may have divergent interests. For Finnish parents, for example, raising tuition was very unpopular. For British parents, they didn't want too much American influence and were happy with a school that only went to an intermediate level, such as the 6th grade. There were tremendous battles on the school board between the British and the American parents, because of the different philosophies of the school. The British parents thought one of the great benefits of working for the foreign office was that they could send their children to a boarding school at a fairly early age at Her Majesty's expense. The school as it was, was just fine for those parents. There was also a strong British orientation to the curriculum because the teachers and the headmaster were British. We wanted to introduce an American influence. For example, my kids didn't know who Thomas Jefferson was, but they did know Guy Fawkes

So, I spent a lot of my time during this assignment working on school issues. Being on any school board is a hard thing to do, especially in a small school where parents don't hesitate to call to tell you their opinion about things, sometimes very strongly. On the school board, we had, I think, three American embassy spouses in addition to me. Working on the school board, I learned about diplomacy and negotiation in a "hostile environment." "Hostile" because our American needs differed so sharply from what the British and local parents wanted.

Q: Well, let's elaborate just a little bit more. One, you're pointing to something rarely appreciated, which is the role of American schools and American families as opposed to the boarding model overseas; and two—to the diplomatic skills and lessons you must have honed on the board.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, until you are living in a foreign capital, it's easy to forget that many employees going abroad also have families. The schools play an important part in making the assignment possible. If you have high school kids and don't want to send them to a boarding school, then you're going to be very selective about where you apply for jobs. The same is true of junior high aged children. How happy your children are in their school, moreover, is a major issue related to job satisfaction.

Q. How did that have any impact on Helsinki society? Finland is known for its high quality public education. So, it's important to remember that, but it is all conducted in Finnish for the most part, until maybe you get to the technical and specialties in the university. But certainly, you were bringing in new concepts of education, new concepts of how you live.

My second question is: the foreign service, based on the British Raj model basically, and this is true globally—always assumed and was really carried out on the back of, and I don't mean this in an exploitive way, but it was just a fact of family-based. And today's world is very, very different. Two salaries are required. Professional women want to be able to exercise both their knowledge and be compensated for their worth in that regard. We have many more forms of marriage, we have many more forms of partnership, many more forms of families now. Is the family model going to be sustainable? Going forward, looking forward, because you're talking about a world now very, very different from what you were, the one you were living in Helsinki, from '79 to '83.

CLEVERLEY: Well, yes, we are. But perhaps the commonality between today and forty years ago is that we still have children who have to go to school, So, whatever the family structure is today, we still have that same need that has to be covered.

Over the last few years, Finland has been ranked number one or number two, as far as schools are concerned, but this improvement in their school system was in a very early evolutionary stage at that time. Many Finnish schools were not as good then. One of the things that had influenced the Ministry of Education was something I mentioned before, the need or the desire on the part of the Left to get involved with cultural institutions. Education was one of those. We needed the support of the Ministry of Education. On the other hand, we didn't want any ties where they would start imposing on us things which would not necessarily benefit our children and the environment they encountered when going to school in Finland.

Children are expensive for families and the embassy, and maybe the families aren't quite as large, but they still exist. And perhaps, one thing that is even more intense now is the sense of urgency, or need that many parents have, for a very good education for their children.

Q: Yeah, high quality education.

CLEVERLEY: Certainly, times have changed since we were struggling with schooling in Helsinki, but parents are very much involved these days, almost to an excess. I mean, there are books being written about over parenting and all the difficulties in learning with parents so on top of the process. That existed then, but not so much. I can't see a time in the near future when embassies will not need to be actively engaged in ensuring schools abroad meet the needs of their families.

Just as a final note on this. When I was there on my second tour, I went to visit the school, and the largest international cohort was not the English or the Americans, it was the Russians.

Q: Interesting. But that goes to the first point I was asking about, which is the soft unheralded impact of American education, because we have diplomatic families and military and have to have American schools abroad. And that's part of the diplomatic

agreement or treaty in the context of mutual recognition, representation, and exchange of ambassadors.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, absolutely. The Finns didn't lose that, because for Finnish diplomats when abroad, it was the same thing. They would usually send their children to an American school or an international school. They were sympathetic.

Q: It didn't shorten your workday.

CLEVERLEY: No, it didn't shorten my workday. I worked incredibly hard during those years, and Seija, too. She taught Finnish at our embassy and to the Swedish ambassador and other Swedish diplomats during the first half of our assignment. And then during the second half of our tour, she took a job in an embassy section that needed an American citizen who was a native Finnish speaker.

At least once a month, we visited Seija's family in Lahti. Her mother, Lempi, as I mentioned earlier, was in a wheelchair, and she had a stroke during the last year of our assignment. We were very fortunate that we could spend that year helping her and Seija's father, Manne. She was totally bedridden in the hospital. Manne needed a new place to live, one that would be a little easier to take care of. Before we left post, we helped him sell their house and buy an apartment. As an only child, you can imagine Seija's sense of responsibility. Our nomadic lifestyle didn't make meeting that responsibility any easier.

Discovering the Host Country

Lots of work, but we had fun, and one thing that we did along with several other members in the embassy was to participate in a cross-country ski marathon called the Finlandia Ski Race. It was part of a robust international series of cross-country ski marathons. This one was seventy-five kilometers. Seija grew up on skis and learned to ski as soon as she learned to walk. But for uncoordinated me, it was a real challenge.

We drove about two hours from Helsinki, lined up on a frozen lake early one Sunday morning. We had seventy-five kilometers to go. It was very cold. There were 30,000 of us that started out. Engineers checked out the ice the previous day to be sure it would hold the weight of 30,000 people. I wrote an article about it that was published in the State Department newsletter. It was the type of thing that adds hue to an assignment. I always found that if you can do what the local people do for recreation, you will enjoy the assignment and know the country so much better.

Q: Yes. Well, and you learn a lot, because those six embassy people among 30,000 Finns, believe it or not, did not go unnoticed.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, no, all right, they didn't. I guess I was about thirty-five, but still not so old. A woman skied by me quickly, and I noticed on the back of her number a British flag: Britain, where no one cross country skied. When I caught up to her, I asked her how old she was, and she said sixty-five. Sixty-five and not even Finnish. There weren't many

cross-country skiers that skied that day at that age. It took me ten and a half hours to do the course. When I was done, I thought I had been run over by a truck.

Let's move on from Finland to my next assignment. University training.

Harvard JFK School of Government 1983-1984

Q: How did you have the opportunity and why did you want to take it? Because, in my observation over thirty years, foreign service officers mostly avoided continuing education. And you went not only to JFK but also to the National War College, which suggests that you did your career pathing a little differently.

CLEVERLEY: My entire career path diverged from the normal.

Q: Why did State want you to go to Harvard? Because they wouldn't have offered the opportunity if they hadn't felt there was some value in it for the institution, presumably. Walk us through that.

Western European Studies

CLEVERLEY: When I started looking for the next posting, the Department had several university-training assignments, many of them in management. But there were other areas, too: Latin American studies, Eastern European studies, Russian studies, for example. There was also a slot for Western European Studies. Few people applied for the Western European slot, but it interested me because I wanted to deepen my understanding of what had been my interest for a long time. I also wanted to take a step back from the previous four years when I was heavily involved on what I called the "front lines" of foreign affairs. When I applied for it, I got a nibble almost immediately.

Q: "Hey, Charlie, we've got a live one here."

CLEVERLEY: Exactly. There was also another benefit: university training assignments were linked to a follow up assignment associated with the university year. Before you started university training, you knew where you were going. The follow up assignment idea was brilliant. It allowed you to tailor your study to acquire expertise valuable for your next job. I quickly got paneled into the Western European studies university assignment. It was a lot harder to get the follow up assignment, and that didn't come until almost my departure from Helsinki. I couldn't report for duty at the university without that assignment, so HR had to come up with something. Finally, there was a new position that opened in London's general economic policies unit. It was an FS-03 officer job. They asked if I was interested. To be honest, after the rough and tumble experience I had had with British members of the school board, I at first wasn't sure if I wanted a job in Britain. But it didn't take very long to say yes.

Q: On the board. They are not fun people to negotiate with.

CLEVERLEY: So, yeah they're very competent, and they're very good.

Q: And they're very slick.

CLEVERLEY: So, yeah, that's how it started out. How did I end up in the Kennedy School? The policy at that time was that you could go to any university that had a credible program in what you're supposed to study, and where you could be accepted. So, it had to be approved. I started looking around the United States for a Western European studies program, and believe it or not, I found only a few. There was a good one at Claremont, and somewhere else I don't remember.

The Kennedy School Experience

When I came across the Kennedy School MPA [Master of Public Administration] at Harvard, I thought it might work very well. The MPA was a mid-career program for people exactly like me. It had one requirement, and that was you had to complete eight courses during two semesters to get the degree. But you could also cross register into several schools there, including the Fletcher School of Diplomacy. The Harvard Business and Law schools, MIT, and Harvard itself were also available for cross registration.

I needed breadth of study because "Western European Studies" could encompass almost anything. I realized the Boston-Cambridge area was the richest academic community in the world. Since the Kennedy School had cross-registration agreements with several of the institutions there, I knew I could put together my own program, picking and choosing courses that interested me and satisfied the State Department. I applied and had no difficulty getting accepted. That's how I ended up at the Kennedy School. It wasn't the Kennedy School itself that interested me, but the programs it offered.

A close classmate of mine was Tony Wayne. I think he was doing management training, but there was so much flexibility in both the State Department and the Kennedy School that he was able to pretty much do what he wanted. Tony's follow-up assignment was Paris in the political section. So, being able to take advantage of what was available at Harvard in that environment was important for him, too, as it was for me. We took a few classes together.

It was a terribly beneficial year. First, I knew that I was going to the UK, so that helped focus me. I was going to an economic job in a general economic policy unit, which was probably as broad a job as you could get in a massive embassy like London. With that in mind, I took two classes in international political economy. I knew from my experience that institutions like the GATT, the IMF, the European Union, and more were basic fixtures in the economic world. I took international finance from Jeffrey Sachs who was the youngest tenured professor at Harvard and was considered one of the most important minds on that subject. He had done some recent comparative research on European and American labor markets that became fundamentally important for evaluating issues in my coming job. I deepened my understanding of Europe, cross-registering at MIT. I took two or three classes at Fletcher and classes at Harvard College.

Probably, I liked Fletcher most of all. From my point of view as a foreign service officer, Fletcher was very hands-on, whereas Harvard was more theoretical. It was nice to get the theory at Harvard, but it was important to get into Fletcher's everyday practice approach. And then Fletcher was so connected. One day, the professor came into our international security course, where there were only six students in the class, and said that after class, he was getting together with the last living German general from Operation Barbarossa and invited us to join him. Another time, he told us they had six former secretaries of state on a panel on Saturday, if we wanted a ticket. Or another day, he had free tickets to a dinner where Alexander Haig was speaking.

The Hillside Panorama vs. Down in the Valley Vision

Now, what did the State Department get out of this? What did I get out of the experience? What did the universities get from us? For me, the training was extremely valuable for several assignments afterwards. I developed a deeper understanding and fuller grasp of cutting-edge issues and the history behind them than I could ever get just reading the news or trying to fit into professional reading on the side of jobs that often went intensively night and day. This was long-term professional development and very focused. If I were just an ordinary student, I might have had a little bit of a shotgun approach. But when I knew what type of work I would have, and where I would be doing it on the next assignment, I could have laser focus.

Q: And it wasn't what people think of as training—meaning narrow, skills-based, short term. You were really getting continuing education and professional formation.

CLEVERLEY: I think part of the problem we have in the Foreign Service is we inevitably have a narrow telescopic view of the terrain and its issues that we confront every day. We are down in the valley fighting every skirmish. Our view is from the edge of the skirmish. The danger of that is you may easily lose sight of the forest for the trees. Academia, on the other hand, has a different perspective and point of view. In academia, you are sitting on the hillside looking down at the valley, getting a broad-focused vista from the hillside perch. The danger here is that without the detail of the valley, you may err in your interpretation of the panorama.

Both views have their own relevance. If you have a chance to get out of the valley for a year, parked at academia's scenic turn-out, this is both refreshing and thought-provoking. That's why later I wanted to go to the War College, too. It was extremely helpful to take the hillside view before assuming an assignment. And on the flip side, I found it was stimulating for my professors and fellow students to get a take on my "down-in-the-valley view." It was something valuable that the university got from us.

Q: The practitioner or the operator, the executor.

CLEVERLEY: I'll give you an example of this. When I was at Fletcher, I took a class in post-World War I Western European relations up to the present, really Western European

foreign policy of the 20th century. The professor was an old Swiss journalist who, when young, had even covered the Spanish Civil War. He had been around a lot and was in Switzerland during War II. He was teaching this class from the hillside view of foreign affairs.

We all had to write a paper, and he asked us to turn in a topic. I said, I'd like to write about Finnish-Soviet economic relations after World War II. He came back to me to say that really wouldn't work. I was surprised and asked, "Why not?" "This class is centered on Western Europe, and Finland is part of Eastern Europe," he said. I responded, "If you really believe that, you better let me write the paper." He smiled and laughed, and said, "Okay, write the paper." So, I did.

Q: Good for you.

CLEVERLEY: You know, we talked about it earlier, how Finland had expanded its sovereignty and actually exploited those trade relations with the USSR. It clarified its identity as a Western country and Western culture, not as a member of the East Bloc. I was surprised that a Swiss academic could believe Finland was in Eastern Europe, as sharp as the divide was between East and West in the Cold War. But you see how easy it was even for him to miss the real world down in the valley.

I do believe he never focused on the idea that Finland was what it was. Anyway, he was happy with the paper, gave me highest marks, and said that he was glad I did it because he learned much. That was kind of him. I noticed how in some of my classes, the professor would ask questions that pertained to my experience. Sometimes it started a discussion on a different level. It was a very good interchange and exchange of perspectives.

From my experience, I would think that university training should have a central role in the State Department's professional development program. But if you're going to do it, you should have that follow-up assignment so that you can get the most out of it.

Q: Yeah. So, there's an operational purpose to it as well as strategic value, if you will. We have a smarter, better formed, better and, you know, refreshed officer.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. It seems from today's vantage point that the Foreign Service has evolved in a different direction. Then, deep nuanced expertise in your host country was valued, and this was both evidenced and generated by the string of analytical reporting coming from embassies. Today, it's a more operational Foreign Service where officers neither have time to produce such reports nor read them. Has this been the right direction? I tend to doubt it, but then I'm from an older generation. I value operational diplomacy, however, and over my career probably spent more time doing that than writing.

Life in Cambridge

It occurred to me before we left Helsinki that in a university environment, faculty members are leaving on sabbatical all the time and looking for one-year renters. So, I wrote to the Kennedy School and told them that we would be interested in renting a furnished house if there was anyone looking for a short-term renter. We soon received a letter back from a woman who had just finished her PhD at Harvard and was leaving to teach a year at Swarthmore. She wanted to rent her house. We had a deal.

Our new landlord's ex was an anthropologist who specialized in Native Americans. He had picked up tremendous amounts of Native American art. Much of it was in the house we rented. Their large Victorian house was like a museum. She was delighted that she wouldn't have to pack things. We just moved all our things into the basement. But there were two conditions. We had to take their dog and care for it during the year, which was okay for us. And there was a psychiatrist who was renting an apartment upstairs, and we had to take him and his girlfriend too. The three-story house was right in Cambridge proper on Arlington Street and was probably built in the late 1800s.

Q: Was it in Brighton-Cambridge proper, or one of the outer rings?

CLEVERLEY: It was right in Cambridge proper on Arlington Street.

Q: Anything on the family side, having the children because they were just going to be in school for a year and then yanked out and transported someplace else? Did that cause any problems or did you use the Cambridge Public Schools? How was that?

CLEVERLEY: There were a few problems with schooling. This was the era of bussing. In practice, the choice of schools was first come-first serve. Since we were registering late, only our twin daughters who were now in the 8th grade were able to attend the neighborhood Peabody School, a short walking distance from our house. Our two boys, unfortunately, had to be bussed to another part of Cambridge. The girls loved it and made interesting friends. The boys didn't like the long bus rides for an hour every morning to what must have been less popular schools.

Q: Trafficking and picking up kids and a bus ride, you know, can become a very lengthy affair to go a relatively short distance if you're thinking about highway miles.

CLEVERLEY: We felt bad that the kids were on the bus for so many hours. But our oldest son's teacher was a capable Harvard graduate. And the younger son's teacher was devoted. She even corresponded with our son after he left. I think they got a good education. It was just the idea of having to be on the other side of town.

London, United Kingdom 1984-1988

Q: Well, and a lot of Americans were upset about just such problems—busing in Boston, and particularly in Boston proper, with all of its dimensions and different communities, produced some sizable riots that time in history. So, did you go directly from Cambridge to London, or via Washington? Via home?

CLEVERLEY: Before departing Cambridge, we shipped our Volkswagen camper ahead of time. When we got to London, it was waiting for us, and we drove to Finland to spend three weeks with Seija's parents before returning to London. It was an important visit because due to her stroke, Seija's mother had been hospitalized the entire time since we left Finland the year before. It was the last time we saw her.

The embassy had offered us either a large house in the suburbs, or something smaller in the center. We chose to be in Central London, near the embassy, in a four-story townhouse. We had four children, and we had five bedrooms, some of them small, just across from Hyde Park in the center, near Paddington. It was easy for a family to be in London with its versatile public transportation. Instead of paying for school busing the embassy gave tube tickets. The children, now growing teenagers, were totally mobile in the big city with an underground network that could take them to school and anywhere else. We lived there for four years.

Right after I arrived at Harvard, I was promoted to an O2 officer. My career adviser called me a couple days later and said that if I wanted, they would break the follow up assignment, because I'd be going into an O3 position as an O2 officer. I said no, I would keep the London assignment. I wasn't sure what they would come up with at that point.

Q: Exactly. And you were preparing mentally and intellectually for London, or the UK.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, most important of all. Nor was I sure being an O2 in an O3 slot would hurt me career-wise. If I were going to bet, I would have said what was more important than the grade of the position was what I did in the position. So, I arrived an O2 into an O3 job.

The Complexity of US-UK Relations 1984

I arrived at the embassy in London in 1984. It was then located on Grosvenor Square, across the street from what had been the US Navy headquarters since World War II. It was one of our largest embassies. This was the Thatcher and the Reagan era. The two of them hit it off well as political kindred spirits who shared similar views about politics, society, and what they wanted to achieve in society. They also had similar views about their common enemy, the USSR. The US and UK enjoyed big cooperation in many areas, especially political and military cooperation in the East-West context. These were the late Cold War days, and in 1984, no one guessed that the Cold War was going to end as soon as it did. Both Reagan and Thatcher believed it was very important to develop a strong posture against the Soviet Union.

The biggest area of contention between the two countries was over American extraterritoriality. When I arrived at post, I didn't even know what extraterritoriality was, but I quickly found it was a big amorphous issue that invoked a negative reaction among the British public from the street level all the way to Thatcher. They saw American extraterritorial laws as encroachments on their sovereignty. The Reagan administration,

especially, had difficulty understanding this. It was very easy for everyone from working level customs agents to the cabinet level to step on Britain on sovereignty issues. And in most cases, Britain reacted vocally and sometimes in action, as well.

Thatcher, as unpopular as she was with the Left, was a powerful politician and had to manage the fallout from unilateral American go-it-on-your-own policies. For example, when Reagan bombed Libya, there were demonstrations throughout the UK. The American planes came from British bases apparently without a British go-ahead. Rioters broke shop windows all along Oxford Street near the embassy.

Q: Now, remind people what that was all about. There was a reason for it.

CLEVERLEY: Washington believed that Libyan sponsored terrorists were targeting Americans in third countries. For example, American servicemen were attacked in a club in Germany. At one point, Reagan launched a strike on Tripoli using aircraft based in Great Britain. It nearly killed Gaddafi.

I was in Scotland, calling on the mayor of Glasgow the morning after the bombing. He was from the Labor Party, on the Left. Just as I got into his office, his secretary came in to say there was a group of journalists congregated outside the office. They had heard news about the Tripoli attack and had learned that someone from the American Embassy was calling on the mayor. It was a somewhat awkward situation for both him and me, perhaps more for him. He was a savvy politician and said, "Just come out with me. Don't say a word. Stand by me. I'll do the talking." We went into his waiting room, and he explained that this was an ordinary diplomatic call scheduled well before the events of the previous night. I did just as he asked, stayed quiet. He refused to take any questions about the Libya bombing, finessed the moment like a true professional, and managed to be gracious to me as well.

Q: Wow.

Embassy London 1984

CLEVERLEY: Another thing that characterized embassy functions at the time, and probably still today, was the heavy unceasing flow of official visitors. Embassy London hosted 20,000 official visitors a year. These were United States government visitors needing support in one way or another arriving to visit British counterparts. Providing logistical support was a problem in and of itself, but keeping on top of the issues they were talking about was also a challenge. Compounding the problem was the fact that many American cabinet secretaries would simply call British counterparts and never inform the State Department. You would hear about these high-level dialogues, but often nobody in State knew about them, especially if they were coming out of the Department of Defense.

Q: Yeah, and who was the ambassador at that time?

CLEVERLEY: The ambassador was Charles Price. He was a political appointee from the family that owned a Kansas City, Missouri, candy and chocolate company. He was competent, not a professional, but effective. He had an excellent DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), Ray Seitz. Between the two of them, the embassy was well run. Within the embassy, the economic section was a large inter-agency structure that included not only State units but Treasury, Customs, FAA (Federal Aviation Administration), a science office, IRS (Internal Revenue Service), FCS (Foreign Commercial Service), and FAS and more. The economic Minister Counselor headed the economic functions. The economic counselor oversaw most of the State components, which included our general economic policy unit. There were also a State officer seconded to the Treasury office, an aviation officer, and a science counselor.

Q: So, your country team was very large. Are we talking about thirty, thirty-five, forty, agency reps?

CLEVERLEY: There were easily thirty to forty officers at the Country Team meeting. Everybody didn't always necessarily agree on things, but we got on well enough. It was a big thing to manage and hold together, but the ambassador and DCM did it well. I was in the general economic policy unit headed by an O1 chief who was also the energy officer. His job was especially important because of North Sea oil and petroleum. We also covered trade, the European Union, and general economic reporting.

Q: Again. What were the best topics you covered?

CLEVERLEY: I had an interesting set of topics to cover. I was responsible for strategic and foreign policy trade controls, which were main plank issues in the British-American relationship and in our Cold War standoff. With this portfolio, I worked extensively with other sections, such as the Defense Attaché, Customs, FCS, Treasury, the FBI, and many more. Each of these different sections owned a part of the elephant. It was a big elephant, especially in Washington where there was intense competition to promote parochial interests among the host agencies. I also had the extraterritoriality portfolio, one that often emanated from the previous set of issues.

Then I covered the Labor Party's economic policy. It was interesting to deal with Labor, because despite our fundamental political differences, we often enjoyed their company more than we did the Conservatives who were kind of stiff and didn't like Americans very much, anyway. The Labor Party, then under Neil Kinnock, had shed its old school Left image for one, then under construction, more acceptable to the mass of British voters. Party officials were easy, with more of an American type of personality and not so much class consciousness, even though their views were almost totally different from ours on many issues. As an Embassy officer following Labor Party policy, I had easy access to the Labor Party crowd. Britain was drawing nearer to an election, and the Labor Party's economic policy intrigued Washington a lot because economic policy was a crucial issue for the Reagan administration. They wondered what would happen if Kinnock were elected.

The Diplomacy of American Extraterritoriality

Q: Yeah, which is one of the joys of following the opposition. How did extraterritoriality express itself in economic terms?

CLEVERLEY: There were several different ways, but the most obvious way in those days was through the strategic and foreign policy trade controls.

Q: Through the trade controls.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, because American policy and our legal structure have traditionally been extraterritorial in character. For example, an American living and earning money abroad still has a tax responsibility to the United States. You carry that with you wherever you go. It is extraterritorial because the United States is exerting sovereignty over someone who's not living in the United States.

With the trade controls, especially the foreign policy controls, we not only controlled or tried to control the export of U.S. technologies directly to the East Bloc or pariah states like Iran. We also tried and often succeeded in controlling American technology sold to a Western country that would then be resold to the rest of the world. What that meant was you were exerting U.S. territoriality to American technology that was being re-sold abroad, often by a non-American firm.

If a British company, for example, were to sell a controlled American product to say Cyprus where it was re-sold to Iran, the United States government would come after that British company and exert penalties and sanctions against the company for violating U.S. export laws. In this case, the transaction was by a British company working in Britain, and its customers were foreign customers. An American attempt to penalize the British company was totally extraterritorial. Even though Britain agreed with us on the need to control the technologies, it did not agree that the United States had any legal right to sanction a British company for operations done in the UK. The same thing happened in US antitrust enforcement when the United States tried to bring a British firm to an American court for antitrust violations in the United States, even if all the actions took place outside of the United States. There was a famous case of this with British Airways.

Q: You're using the term sanction, which has a very current usage and context. Was there a difference between trade controls and sanctions back then? Or was that simply again, the language of the era?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I'm using "sanction" synonymous with "penalize" commercially or criminally. "Sanctions," and in the sense we often hear the term today in connection with foreign policy trade controls. Although in the current cases of Russian sanctions the effort tends to be coordinated multilaterally, the United States has traditionally had a unilateral tendency in its sanctions regimes. The United States would unilaterally sanction a country and then attempt to force foreign companies that had access to American technology to follow the terms of these sanctions, again something extraterritorial. When

sanctioning a company, the US Government might fine them large amounts of money, or simply deny them access to any technology from the United States, a penalty that could throw the foreign firm into bankruptcy.

Q: Wow, yeah. Could the British theoretically reciprocate and do the same to us? Or was it a one-way street effectively?

CLEVERLEY: Well, philosophically and legally, the UK didn't believe in extraterritoriality. It would not retaliate in kind against the United States, but it could issue an order to one of their firms, or to an American firm based in the UK, forbidding them to comply with the US export controls as far as in-Britain operations were concerned. This produced a Catch-22 environment for firms. Elements of the embassy, like customs or the intelligence agencies, might occasionally find a British company selling something to a third country, again say Cyprus, that was then sold on to the USSR. Of course, we would sanction the Cypriot company, but we would also levy penalties against the British company. If the British government ordered the British based firms to non-comply with the US, the companies were in a damned if you do and damned if you don't world.

Beyond that, investigative elements of the embassy, like say Customs, might track potential violators in Britain using methods that only British law enforcement agencies were allowed to use. You might have operations from the embassy that were totally illegal in the UK. The State Department's role at the embassy on this front, in practice my role, was to prevent things like that from happening. It was very difficult for a law enforcement officer, who saw things often as black or white, to restrain from actions that they took when operating in the United States.

It got to be quite complicated on many different levels with many different agencies. The State Department was the broker, or was supposed to be the broker, in this. There were people like Richard Perle, a senior official at the Department of Defense, countering an assistant secretary in the Department of Commerce, whose job was to sell American products, with State in the middle. It was a hot, difficult time. I later published an article about West-West frictions in the field of trade controls.

Q: And where was it published?

CLEVERLEY: In a journal called *Global Affairs*. It was a fascinating topic that doesn't seem to exist as much today as then. But at the time it was a critical interface in United States-Great Britain relations. I thought that perhaps the reason the British were so sensitive over it was that they were still coming to grips psychologically with the loss of their empire. Infringements on their sovereignty, even in small measure, was still a sore subject.

The Falklands War, just two years before we arrived, highlighted more than anyone wanted to see how far the British Empire had fallen from its height of glory. They barely had the ships or the equipment for the operation and relied greatly on American

intelligence to make it work. Besides that, London's high streets were run by clerks from the once colonies. Every home but one in the upscale row where we lived was occupied by non-ethnically British. I wrote a major report on this subject for Washington. I named it "The Empire's Revenge."

Life in the Economic Section

In addition to the everyday topics I followed, I did a good deal of general economic reporting. This is where that year at Harvard came in so valuable. During my studies, I had really gotten into theories about the UK's economic decline. And in the early '80s Britain was truly at an all-time low point. I had a lot of thoughts about it, and I did some excellent reports on Thatcherism's efforts to modernize the British economy. They were well regarded in Washington and elsewhere. The post nominated me for the Department's reporting award, and I was a runner up. The Department came back with a recommendation that I be granted a Superior Honor Award for my reporting. About two or three years into this four-year assignment, I was promoted to an O1 officer.

Q: That's the nicest recognition of all. From an undergrade O3 job to O1.

CLEVERLEY: I had excellent mentoring. The head of our unit, Larry Taylor, who succeeded to economic counselor at embassy London, was an exceptional officer. He later became one of the first American ambassadors to Estonia and the Director of FSI. I felt lucky to have had such a fine senior officer mentoring me, giving me advice and critiques.

The Heavy Flow of Official Visitors

One of the things that took so much time for all of us in London was the official visits. Of those 20,000 a year, so many of them are coming through on various types of economic topics, and not the least of these problems was Richard Perle.

Q: The Black Prince.

CLEVERLEY: The Black Prince, Darth Vader, as he reportedly liked to hear others call him. He also had some henchmen – not a nice word, but appropriate in this case – at the Department of Defense who were very aggressive. They even went after a State Department officer who had said something or done something Perle didn't like, by writing to the under secretary to have this officer dismissed.

When they came to London, they usually were part of an interagency team doing bilateral negotiations on trade controls. There would be maybe five or six different agencies in the American delegation, and none of them seemed to get along. It was always fascinating for the British to watch the interaction on the American side of the table, because they didn't weren't always sure exactly what the American position was. Every agency had its own position. So, there was a lot of herding cats. We tried to bring things together into a coherent message to the British.

When we had that many visitors, the embassy couldn't give them all the same logistical support as they were used to in other countries. We just didn't have the resources. Once, I was control officer for a cabinet secretary and at the same time control officer for the House Science and Technology Committee, which had about eight people, with spouses.

Q: Okay, next session then, we'll do a wrap up on London and move on to your year at the National War College. Was that assignment linked to Athens or was linkage still a predictable procedure at that point?

CLEVERLEY: No. The linkage was only with the university assignments.

Q: But not the War College.

CLEVERLEY: Not the War College.

Q: This is Stephanie Kinney on March 7, in a continuing oral history interview, for ADST (The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training) with Mike Cleverley. Mike, in our last session, you had arrived in London. Ambassador Charles Price was in charge. Ray Seitz was the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) and Larry Taylor [Lawrence P. Taylor] was your immediate boss in the econ section. You described your job as, again, a bit of a catch all. But you were there for four years from 1984 to '88. What else would you like to tell us about that experience?

CLEVERLEY: I can say a word about morale because I think London is usually considered by many in the Foreign Service as the ideal posting. I considered it that way. But there were a lot of things that made it not as easy as people there expected. One was that it was a very large embassy with well over a thousand employees, which was very large.

Q: —and you were at the old embassy in Grosvenor Square?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it was an attractive embassy across from a beautiful Georgian square. We enjoyed the location, right in the center, just off Oxford St. So, it was a great location.

I think for some officers, particularly in the consular section but not just there, the size of the mission and narrowness of their portfolio was a turn off. Especially the junior officers coming to London were often young people who were excited about the Foreign Service and London. It was their first tour. But then they sat in the consular section doing thousands of non-immigrant visas. It got very oppressive.

One of the hats I wore at the Embassy in London was as the AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) representative for the embassy. Occasionally, I had younger officers coming to me with their frustrations, such as a young married couple who were lawyers. They felt they had been misled about the Foreign Service. They expected they were going to be doing something exciting but were instead adjudicating unending piles of non-immigrant visas. This was before the Visa Waiver program. There were also mid-level officers, O2 officers and sometimes O1 officers, who were not happy in London. If you contrasted London jobs with those in Helsinki, where I did all kinds of different things from narcotics to science and got out of the building all the time, the work may not have been as satisfying as some hoped.

It was also hard to know everybody who worked in the embassy. Often, we met colleagues for the first time at a reception, surprised to find that they, too, worked at the embassy. Many were inundated with both official visitors and private visitors. As for private guests, there was a period when we logged house guests for 190-200 days over the course of the 365-day year. Ours was not a unique experience.

And probably a third thing that made London seem so impersonal was that if your interface was the British civil service, as it was for many officers, your contacts couldn't afford to live in the center of London. They lived in the suburbs and commuted by train every day. To get together in the evening, say at a representational event, was difficult. We met our British colleagues usually over lunch, a business lunch. And generally, to get to know the British around you was not always easy.

London in the 1980s

Q: What was the exchange rate like in those days? Favorable or unfavorable?

CLEVERLEY: Both, the pound was weak during the months after we first got there—it may have reached a low of around \$1.11. Just before we left it was in the \$1.60's or more. So at Christmas time 1984, it was a “bargain” for Americans to come to London for a holiday weekend. It added to the Consular Section load.

Q: Explain what you mean by that. It wasn't just the visa mill. It wasn't just thousands and thousands and thousands of people wanting visas, but, they also had to take care of the Americans in London, which reconstituted an army.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, exactly. It added to the Consular Section load: the more Americans coming to the UK, the more people lost their passports, got mugged, lost their purses, died, looked the wrong direction when entering the crosswalk, got sick, and so on. Most

people don't realize how much personal property theft there is in London. Seija's purse was stolen twice while she was there. She witnessed a mugging at midday in Hyde Park.

Q: It's a big city, like New York, only bigger,

CLEVERLEY: There's a long history of this.

Q: How did the British class system affect people?

CLEVERLEY: There was a prevailing rigidity in the British class structure. The Conservative Party, traditionally, was very much class conscious and involved in keeping the classes delineated. The Conservatives were beginning to loosen up on class as they evolved into a more classic form of political conservatism. In the days of Reagan and Thatcher, their views of how the economy should work were quite similar. You could easily have a discussion on markets, the economy, or world events and feel like we saw things alike.

On the other side of town, the Labour Party believed in greater social mobility, but they wanted to achieve it through various types of socialistic approaches and national planning. In America, we were more fixated on the free market and market-related approaches. We had good discussions, relaxed discussions, but based on seriously different mentalities. Labour opposed many planks of American foreign policy.

Q: What does that mean? What did that mean at that time?

CLEVERLEY: Labour was very much opposed to nuclear weapons and actively tried to get nuclear weapons out of Britain. We were in favor of keeping a nuclear deterrent that was vibrant in order to keep the world safer.

Thatcher's War with the Unions

Q: How about labor unions since this was the time of Thatcher?

CLEVERLEY: Well, the labor unions were a big point of discussion at the time. Britain lost a lot of its competitiveness over the '40s, '50s, and '60s. At the end of the 19th century, it was among the greatest industrial powers in the world, only rivaled by Germany. I don't think even the USA was completely there yet. By the mid-1980s, it was very weak and its industrial might was a wasteland. Great industrial cities like Liverpool, and Glasgow, and much of the Midlands teemed with unemployed people and deserted factories.

Q: Like our Rust Belt became?

CLEVERLEY: Yes. In the middle of these problems stood the unions and the way labor was structured. Among other things, labor unions were very much politicized. Some of these unions were greatly communist like the National Union of Mineworkers. Union structure was a problem. In a factory, unions were fragmented, each task maybe having its own union. So, you might have several unions in a factory. In an American factory, you might just find one large union, such as the United Auto Workers. In negotiations, you had two parties, whereas in Britain, you might have a dozen or more, any of which could close the plant.

As she rose, one of Margaret Thatcher's goals was to destroy the unions' power to cripple factory production, and she targeted the National Union of Mineworkers, headed by Arthur Scargill, a communist. She wanted his head on a platter, something she eventually got by closing some of the mines. The miners struck, and she waited it out. The strike began just a few weeks before our arrival in the UK and continued for almost a year. We watched the TV news coverage nightly, complete with the anger, violence, and strike breakers. There was a lot of suffering. Families were split, communities wrecked, and in the end, Arthur Scargill lost his influence and reputation in his own union and elsewhere.

I realized that people in Washington were interested in the question, because it played so much into Reagan administration thinking. Any good reporting on the broader subject of the economic impact of unions in the British decline would get read. At another time, in another place, that might not have been the case. I also thought that you couldn't really do that kind of reporting without getting into the field.

So, I decided to do a report I called "A Tale of Two Cities" that compared Liverpool, which was absolutely in shambles economically, and Bristol, which was a similar type of port city with an industrial past, but which seemed to be thriving. I also went to Glasgow, to get a third view. It was a rather unique thing. I didn't know anyone else in the Embassy traveling to get material for think-piece reporting.

These were reporting trips like Thomas Fina had taught me in Milan. You don't go out to meet the public relations guy at the local aerospace plant. You talk to one of the executives or political leaders, and so on. We didn't have any national employees in our section, so I put the whole thing together myself, finding out who the right people were and getting the appointments. Usually, they were more than happy to see me.

That's how I really got a sense of what was happening on the ground. I did other reporting using the same methods. I won a Superior Honor award for my reporting. Washington was happy, and some in other embassies wrote to DCM Ray Seitz to express compliments for the cables.

Q: Did the addition of Glasgow, which is in Scotland, present a decidedly or particular Scottish factor that did not play in Liverpool, in Bristol? Or were the three cities and their difficult realities of early 20th century technological decline and changes in world markets and world circumstances as well, make a difference? In other words, was there a Scottish factor not present in the other two cities, as opposed to an economic or an industrial or a labor factor?

CLEVERLEY: No, not decidedly so. Of course, “Scotland” was a factor in Glasgow. When I met my first contact in Scotland, the first thing he told me was, “What you need to understand is you have come to Scotland. This is another country. You need to think that you're in another country.” It was good advice, because the Scots thought of themselves then as they do now as another country. But in terms of the industrial organization, that all happened during the 19th century when the unions and the growth of industrialization were very similar to what was happening in the South. Likewise, the huge industrial decline of the mid-20th century took place in a similar way throughout Great Britain.

Q: Interesting. Very interesting. And very interesting that we're talking about the mid- '80s, well before the World Wide Web. Well before the internet. Social media didn't exist. Apps were unheard of, and everybody was on a Nokia, not an iPhone.

CLEVERLEY: Yes. As I said earlier, I have always thought the reporting was most valuable to the reporting officer. They learn so much more about the country than they could otherwise do. As a consequence, the embassy's understanding is fuller and its observations more meaningful.

Q: So, you know what questions to ask, which sometimes is more important than knowing answers. Did people find a similar experience with those myriads of visitors who plagued everyone's lives? Were there people who saw the value and the opportunities that being a control officer involved, particularly with your more senior and entitled individuals, of which you had many, both military and civilian?

The Embassy's Voice in Policy Making

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I think so. In my case, I can't speak for how it worked with others—but in my case, yes, it did help. It especially helped in terms of developing an “embassy policy,” or point of view, in essence. The embassy in those days could be, and I think still can be, a great advocate for a particular policy. In Washington, you are sitting in a regional or functional office trying to promote a policy, sometimes within a vacuum of good analysis, and always with many clearances for anything you propose. You've got to get so many people on board that by the time you ever get that cable out, or that instruction to the field, your work can be beaten to death in the clearance process.

Q: Neutered.

CLEVERLEY: Neutered. But in an embassy policy cable or recommendation, that dynamic doesn't exist very much. If you take a position, which we did in London when we were concerned about extraterritoriality or other United States government policies and actions that might get Thatcher to complain to Reagan, you could easily get the issues laid out on the senior policy level. We were hoping we could shape American policy in ways that would work well for the bilateral relationship. We wrote a lot of cables that sometimes were successful and sometimes not. We gave our ambassador talking points to raise with Secretary of State Schultz during his visit to the embassy or while driving together, so Schultz could go over them with Ambassador Price. Some of our cables reached the White House, making a circuit around State's sometimes stiff bureaucracy.

Q: But he listened?

CLEVERLEY: Sometimes, yes. But sometimes, it was hard to say.

Q: And he did hear? Two different things.

CLEVERLEY: Of course, it was hard to always know how much Schultz listened. The White House had its own strong views on things. Reagan was a hard liner, as far as the Soviets were concerned, and I give him credit for that. But that hard line could sometimes be taken to an excess and damage our relationship with the people we were trying to work with in a cooperative way. Most issues in strategic trade controls involved the Department of Defense, and Secretary of Defense Weinberger was also a strong influence in Washington and London. I can only imagine that Schultz had to pick his battles.

Q: Yeah, well, but you were in the field. You were a diplomat, and your job was relations. And very often, particularly when new teams with little Washington or international experience arrive, they really are very narrowly focused and caring. Not to mention, if

they're not very experienced—never stated but insecure—because everybody around them has more experience, but they have the authority and the power. How did that work out in this period of time? Did people learn quickly? Did they come with—did you see an evolution over time? Talk a little bit about that in your area. It's me and me and me versus we and we and we.

CLEVERLEY: Well, it was a very fragmented and polarized environment on the issue of technology transfer controls. After a team arrived from Washington, often the purpose of the pre-delegation meeting, if there was time for one, was to find out what the other agencies were thinking. At that point, the embassy had an opportunity to play into the discussion. It was still sometimes hard in the difficult interagency interaction because they saw you as a State officer.

Q: How did you bridge that?

CLEVERLEY: Usually writing. We tried to solve this through writing cables to State to influence senior people in the Department and offer practical suggestions to bridge interagency differences. That's what the State Department was supposed to do as the spokesman for the United States government: to take a leadership position in reaching an American consensus in discussions with foreign countries. Because it was Britain, and American agencies could easily call their British counterparts, something they did regularly, our role was complicated.

West-West Trade Control Conflicts

It was always frustrating for the British. They weren't allowed to sit down in a negotiation until they had reached a common position. On our side, there often was no common position at the offset. The British joked with me that they could get a view of the different agencies, but they never knew for sure how it was going to turn out in the end.

Q: Yeah, pretty difficult, because it was pretty unpredictable.

CLEVERLEY: It was very unpredictable. The thrust was right. Everybody wanted the same thing. We did have strategic trade controls against the Soviet bloc and often wanted to put some emphasis on foreign policy sanctions, which were the foreign policy prescriptions. But how to get there? What was the process? That is what we debated.

Q: Yeah, there were a lot of different rice bowls.

CLEVERLEY: The issues (particularly the extraterritorial aspects) were high profile. As Embassy point person on them, I would get calls from the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, and others wanting to know what the United States position was. There was so much disinformation it was important to talk to them. I worked regularly with the embassy press attaché.

One journalist regularly trashed the United States harshly in *The Guardian* and other publications. One day, the press attaché asked him to join the two of us for lunch. In the embassy was a nice place we called the “Red Room,” a little restaurant type room off the cafeteria with tablecloths and cloth napkins. It was an inexpensive venue for us, and a lot of people were happy to get an invitation to the Red Room. So was this journalist.

While we were sitting there, he started on a tirade, “You know, your policies are making enemies. The English people don't like the United States.” I looked at him and said, “Well, I'm sure that's true. I get that, but whom do you like? You don't like the French. You don't like the Germans. You don't like the Russians. You don't even like the Scots. So, whom *do* you like?”

Q: How did he answer?

CLEVERLEY: He was totally quiet and then smiled. “You're right.” He was honest at least. Anyway, it broke the ice. We later had a useful discussion, and his style seemed to be perceptibly better.

There was another guy, I don't know if you remember Paddy Ashdown. Ashdown had been elected as a liberal Member of Parliament (MP) in 1983. I arrived in 1984. So, he was a very young MP backbencher as far as the Liberal Party was concerned. It wasn't one of the two big parties, but it was an old party with a voice, and he was trying to make a name for himself. At some point, most politicians do. They choose an issue and then they will beat that issue to death to promote themselves. His issue then was American extraterritoriality.

Q: So, you and Paddy got to be good friends?

CLEVERLEY: No, never friends, but we got to know each other in the press. I eventually got invited to debate him one evening.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: It wasn't a fair debate, because usually with a debate, you have an audience that is deciding which way to go on the issue. But of course, nobody was on my side of it.

Q: This was not the Oxford Debating Society.

CLEVERLEY: No, it wasn't. On my side, it was more just laying out what we were doing and what we were not doing and why, with lots of allegations, many not true, from him. Paddy eventually went on to be chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party and later became High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our meeting was just one more skirmish between our otherwise friendly countries.

Ashdown had a henchman named Kevin Cahill, who worked as some type of legislative assistant. Kevin was placing articles regularly in *The Guardian*, often on the front page, saying the United States had done this, the United States had done that, and so on, all under a seemingly nefarious cloud. Of course, that all played well for Paddy Ashdown, because then he could raise the issue during the prime minister's question time in parliament. It put the government on the defensive.

I never took Cahill's calls to me at the embassy. But one time I met Cahill at a reception, and he opened by asking "Well, what bad have you accomplished today?" We talked, and we then talked several times after that, building a rapport of sorts although we were not friends. When I left the country, he even gave me a copy of his latest book, *Trade Wars*, that scoured United States export control policies and enjoyed some popularity.

Q: That allows for a certain amount of flexibility and understanding ultimately. Or is that not, is that an overstatement?

Trust in Diplomacy

CLEVERLEY: From my interactions with Cahill, I learned a lesson that you can have enemies and not accomplish a lot except to reaffirm a position. Or you can try to put a social element into the discussion and agree to disagree. But it's not so polar. It's not the type of conflict that is so destructive. It has the potential to take some of the misinformation from the discussion. Cahill wrote of American embassy people breaking into a British computer company to get their secrets. After our encounters, I doubt he thought I would ever do that. Before we met, he probably did. When you get the disinformation out of the middle, then you can have a discussion on real issues and at some level can begin to build some trust.

Q: You touched on the word trust, and it's very often connected to truth. How does that play in diplomacy in your experience, or in the diplomatic relationship, because that's what you're describing here? How important is it?

CLEVERLEY: Trust is related to truth. But quite often, trust is also related to points of view. When you trust someone, maybe you accept their point of view as being a legitimate point of view, though you believe it wrong.

Q: It's their point of view.

CLEVERLEY: It's their point of view. So, it's not like I'm good, and you're bad. It is that we are trying to iron out some points. I think trust is essential in embassy relations and embassy officer relations with their counterparts. Almost inevitably, we don't share points of view on everything. But we can have trust in the legitimacy of the other side, something much better than the demonization we see in today's political discourse in America. Otherwise, we would not need diplomacy.

Q: Exactly.

CLEVERLEY: If you can argue your point of view to somebody who trusts you as an honest person, you can usually make more progress in narrowing the differences than if they think you're just spouting a party line, and maybe don't even believe it yourself. I've had those discussions where I didn't believe that my interlocutor believed what they were saying. It led me to think there were other motives involved, and if those were not apparent, the task was to discover them, thus allowing us to determine whether our discussion can reach an understanding of some sort. If you can have trust present, then there is more potential to the discussion.

Q: Yeah, did you come to that, or discover it? Or rediscover it on your own? Or had that been part of your formation as a diplomat?

CLEVERLEY: I think this was one of the things I learned as I went through the Foreign Service. Every assignment offered opportunities to learn it better.

London Color: Margaret Thatcher and the Royal Family

Before we move on from London, perhaps another couple of observations. London was full of magical moments. For whatever its bureaucratic shortcomings, the place offered splendid opportunities to meet many of the most interesting personalities of the time. One who impressed me was Margaret Thatcher. Seija and I met her one evening in the gardens

of Buckingham Palace. Every summer, the Queen gave a big garden bash for the diplomatic community. There were hundreds of British there, as well. It was a huge event.

Q: Is this one of the three garden parties that are yeah—

CLEVERLEY Yes. At one of those, Seija and I were with the Army attaché and his wife. We wanted to get over to some of the famous cucumber sandwiches, but going through the crowd was very difficult. We decided to detour behind the tents placed around the edge of the gardens. It turned out to be a good idea, one few had thought of except two other people walking our direction: Margaret Thatcher and her husband Denis.

She said hello to us and then turned to the Army attaché, and calling him by name asked, “How is George doing?” She meant Vice President George Bush who had just been hospitalized for something. We talked a little bit, and she was extremely cordial. Then she continued her trip with Denis. I was quite impressed and asked him, “How do you know Margaret Thatcher?” He replied, “I don’t. I met her when George Bush was here on a visit a few months ago. I was his control officer and didn’t even sit at the table, just with my back to the wall somewhere on the sidelines.” Somehow, she noticed him and remembered his name. That was just one of her many skills.

Q: Wow, that's a skill.

CLEVERLEY: That was one of many skills. I saw Margaret Thatcher again at a winter diplomatic ball that the Queen hosted at Buckingham Palace during our third year in London. I had to dress up in a white tie, and Seija, in her evening gown, had to wear gloves in case she met the Queen. You could not shake the Queen’s hand with bare hands. We were dressed to a tee. Some of our embassy colleagues, starting with the Ambassador and his wife, stood in a line when the royal family came through. Just before they arrived, Margaret Thatcher was coming down the staircase and fainted right there in front of us.

Q: Oh, my God.

CLEVERLEY: Her staff picked her up and carried her out. Not a word about it in the newspaper the next day. I’m sure the demands of that job can absolutely exhaust people, any person. Finally, the royal family arrived where our mission people were waiting in a line.

Q: Who was the head of the U.S. delegation. Was it always the ambassador and then the staff would shift? Or how did that work?

CLEVERLEY: The Ambassador and DCM were always there, and I think all the rest were rotated from year to year. The Queen greeted the Ambassador. Probably, it was Prince Charles who greeted the DCM. Next to me was John Barcus, our aviation officer, and Diana walked up to him. The event took place just as the scandal about her marriage was hitting the newspapers. Barcus was kind of a wit. When Diana said to him, “Well, I’ve been in your ambassador’s beautiful residence.” He replied with a big smile, “Maybe you should come to stay there longer.” She immediately caught his meaning, laughed, and answered, “Yeah, maybe that’s not a bad idea.”

Q: Very cheeky. Who did you get?

CLEVERLEY: Prince Philip shook my hand. Noticing I was at the end of the line, he said, “What do you do? Change the trash baskets in the embassy?” I’m sure it was his joke, but the remark so fully fit his public image that both amused and sometimes startled people.

Of all my postings, London was my favorite in terms of professional interaction and development. My British counterparts were a high cut level of professional. I was always impressed at how comfortable the British had long fit into their role as a world power. In the United States, it seems that we are still trying to cope with the idea.

Q: Yeah. It was Kenneth Clark who said that the mark of civilization and the essential is confidence. And the British still retain that very much from their glory days. You’ve spoken about your relationship with the British, with counterparts in London, both at the FCO (Foreign & Commonwealth Office) and British inter-agency. What was your relationship with the desk? Did you have your own desk officer? Was the desk handled by the section chief? What was your relationship to Washington?

CLEVERLEY: Communications with our State Department counterparts was free and easy. There was of course the Office of Northern European Affairs, and one of its units was the UK desk. It was a big part of the office. A mid-level officer on the desk dealt with economic issues. We were on the phone regularly. It would have been too difficult for all our communications with the desk to go through a single point, such as the chief of the unit. What I was doing, for example technology transfer, was so different from what our unit chief was doing on energy. He was more than happy when I called directly.

Q: Well, and you also had other offices just within EUR besides the regional desk, per se. You had the regional office that handled a lot of the multilateral and new “issues.” And you had the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) desk effectively—or had that

been moved by that time—I'm thinking we had the old UNP. No, not UNP, what was it? There was a NATO desk that was part of, effectively part of WE—Vlad Lahovich and that crowd in the early '80s. I don't know what had happened by the time you were there.

CLEVERLEY: I rarely dealt directly with the regional political-military office in the European Bureau. Instead, I interfaced with the Office of East-West Trade in the economic and commercial bureau [EB]. NATO was peripheral in many ways to the thrust of the technology transfer issue. It was handled in the Department of Defense by people who were not in the NATO command structure. In the embassy, the defense attaché, of course, covered all of those different issues, and we worked closely with the defense attaché.

Q: In terms of Washington relationships how—it sounds like you were multitasking all the time, because you were handling sixteen lobster traps on the British side and an equal number on the United States government domestic across the pond side. Do you have observations or lessons learned or relative value balance, insights about that?

CLEVERLEY: It wasn't multitasking at its hardest because the subjects were often related. There was an overlap, of course, and in the end, it worked just fine. To me, the juggling offset the disadvantage of being in a super large embassy like London, since it offered a chance to get out and do different things. If I had been doing aviation, for example, it would have been very straightforward and narrow. I liked it that way. Because of the nature of technology transfer, I was at the Ministry of Defense one day, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office another, and the Department of Trade and Industry the next day. So, I did have a variety of interfaces.

Q: Yeah. Did you do other reporting initiatives like the “tale of two cities”?

CLEVERLEY: I did a couple of think-piece primers on extraterritoriality and technology transfer, both of which were fairly dense and technical, that helped clarify them for many in our bureaucracy. They were received very well.

Americans Banked British Ideas

We also knew that in Washington there was interest in education because the Reagan administration hoped to bring some new approaches based on freedom and choice to education. Bill Bennett (William Bennett) was the secretary of education at that time, and a known educator who wrote books and was a regular talking head even afterwards. His counterpart on the British side was a man named Kenneth Baker, an influential Conservative party regular. Bennett and Baker saw things in similar ways. One

conversation I remember from the thousands I had a chance to follow during my career was over lunch one day at the DCM's residence when the two of them brain-stormed how to improve schools and parental involvement in the schooling process.

Nevertheless, there were some big differences in our two education systems, particularly during the 1980s information revolution when American firms were transforming ideas into investment and products. We decided to ask about the nature of the British education system and especially of their R&D science and technology establishment. We knew there were a lot of great minds in Britain, but they were not coming up with the patents nor creating enough new profitable innovations. This was another analytical report I did that seemed to get a lot of attention. I spent, maybe a couple months visiting laboratories, universities and science and technology people. Also, I met with British high-tech companies to discuss how they tried to turn the great research done in British universities into sales.

Q: And this was 1985, '86?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it was. I found that a lot of the great ideas were in fact coming out of Britain. But a traditional cultural bias against engineering (and marketing) hindered their commercialization. Engineering faculties like in Cambridge or Oxford were not as prestigious as those in basic research, physics, chemistry and so forth. So, they had a problem getting the engineering and marketing behind the innovations. In the United States, that wasn't a problem. We were producing people like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. Some of the basic ideas behind American innovations actually were born in British laboratories, but they failed at commercializing. My interlocutors lamented that the Americans made money off the ideas of British researchers.

A Family in London

I'll just say something about my family and our family circumstances in London because this—as I understand it—is a holistic type of oral history where we talk about the family and every part of the Foreign Service career.

The London assignment was a key phase in our family's life. We had three children in high school, and it was a crucial time for them and certainly for us. London was a very all-encompassing type of city with so much richness to it. It played a very important role in our children's lives while we lived there. We continued to be very active in our congregation. Our church had a beautiful chapel on the south side of Hyde Park, right next to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Inside every Sunday, members from over 45 nationalities met, and the rest, maybe 40 percent of those there, were tourists passing through London. It gave us a chance to meet people in a way we didn't have otherwise.

The townhouse that the embassy rented for us was owned by a Cypriot Greek. Most of the streetside townhouses were owned by foreigners. Directly behind our little row of townhouses was a mews. Originally, they were stables, and now the mews had been converted to homes. Some British people lived in the mews, but it was not easy meeting them. The day we arrived, we drove into the mews where our garage was located and parked the Volkswagen camper we had driven across the United States. It was a novelty when everybody else in our neighborhood drove luxury cars. The kids got out of the car, and we were loud like Americans. Then, a British neighbor in the mews, Mrs. Bruce, came out to meet us. She said, "I see you're moving in." We answered with smiles, "Yes, we are your new neighbors."

She looked us up and down and then said, "Well, let me tell you the rules," and went through about ten rules: If we were going to park our car in the little driveway in front of the garage, we needed to make sure we got all the way in. The children were not allowed to play with balls or soccer balls in the mews. Don't make too much noise, and so on. We were used to more gracious welcomes than that but said okay and hoped we wouldn't have a lot to do with Mrs. Bruce after that. Then, there was a guy who was a gardener further down the mews. He had inherited his place from someone he lived with. He didn't seem to have a lot to say to us.

Over time, we learned that there were two things that made you acceptable to the British neighbors. The first was to get a dog. If you had a dog, you could walk it down the street.

Q: It's the animal thing.

CLEVERLEY: If you remember the movie, *A Fish Called Wanda*?

Q: Yes.

CLEVERLEY: The woman who walked her small barking dog down the street each day, that was Mrs. Bruce, or could have been. The day we were seen walking our new Samoyed puppy in front of our line of townhouses, our status rose immensely.

Then, we began to cultivate our window boxes with some roses. Neither Seija nor I are great gardeners. But we were trying, and when some blossoms of red began to peep over the window box, we learned the second aspect of respectability was garden boxes. After several weeks of our spotty efforts, our gardener neighbor came over and said, "Well, it doesn't look so good, but let me help you with it."

Melting in required two things, dogs and window boxes, if we made an effort in any case. They could understand that, as an American, you might not be too good at it. But if you had your priorities right, it was fine. So, we became good friends with our few British neighbors.

The Arabs, we never really got to know. They were a closed society. On both sides of our townhouse, we had Middle Eastern families. On one side for part of the year, were some

women whose faces we never saw because they always wore something covering them. But we did see the designer Levi's they wore underneath because they had a clothesline in the backyard next to ours. Apparently, they were royalty or nobility. They drove around in a Bentley, and their chauffeur's personal car was a BMW 700.

Q: Have you been struck by connecting 1986 to 2021? I mean, to 2022?

CLEVERLEY: We see some of the same trends today in the United States. When shopping in central London, probably half or more of the clerks were from South Asia, not traditional white British. These were people who may have been there for a generation or two, not recent immigrants. There was high unemployment nationwide, but in the lower pay echelons, South Asians were willing to take the jobs. And in the posh shops and department stores, maybe half of the customers were well heeled foreigners particularly from Asia and the Middle East.

Q: Did you ever meet your Middle Eastern neighbors?

CLEVERLEY: No. But I'll mention that one day somebody knocked on the door, and Seija answered. The people standing outside announced, "We are here to see the princesses." Seija looked at them and replied, "Well, here I am," paused for a moment to let it sink in, then directed them next door. They were looking for the people next door. "Princesses," apparently.

Q: Oh, they made a mistake.

CLEVERLEY: On the other side of us, the home was occupied maybe six months a year, or so. It was a bachelor pad that belonged to a *sheik* in the Middle East. Over the summer, the parties there were horrendous. We woke up many nights at three or four o'clock with a roar coming from next door's party. After one summer's revelry ended, I was walking by a gardener working outside the home. I said we had heard some of the parties over the summer. He said actually the parties had gotten so out of hand that the *sheik* had to close them down and remodel the entire house. It had been torn to pieces over the summer."

Q: Oh my gosh, was that the younger generation of the family or what?

CLEVERLEY: It was probably a younger generation of Middle Easterners who were in London to let their hair down and enjoy life to the fullest. They were probably just friends, or friends of friends. The sheik learned that it was too expensive, and it didn't happen the subsequent summer.

Q: Question, Michael, because you're really talking about a non-government—well, in fact there was government money probably somewhere on one side or the other—but we tend to think of cultural exchange, and particularly in those days, government supported cultural exchange particularly in the area of education, professional counterpart expertise, getting people together, was tremendously important and quite systematic, undergirded by organizations and congressional funding.

Based on the concept that if you get people together, if you expose people to each other particularly younger, rather than later—it makes a difference. But what you're pointing to is an unrecognized—perhaps unstudied even—reality of, for better or worse, long term/short term, a dramatic cultural exchange phenomena in your neighborhood right next door because they might have gone back to their royal palaces in the Middle East but just like the oligarchs in Russia—who though Putin has remained and he isolated, or more isolated them—they and their families have lived and are effectively enjoying, have enjoyed, expect a very different kind of life—Western life.

And does that make a difference eventually? We don't know but you're observing essentially the same phenomena in 1986. I wonder if you've speculated or if you even have any views or observations maybe, about these younger generations living in London in a way that was so at odds with their own families and political and cultural realities to which they had to return.

CLEVERLEY: Well, you know, I thought a lot about it at that time, not just the younger generation, but the impact of the outside world, particularly the former colonies, on British Society then. I wrote about it in a cable I mentioned earlier, and that was well received in Washington, called “The Empire’s Revenge.”

Q: Tell us about that.

The Empire’s Revenge

CLEVERLEY: The idea was that Britain during the mid-80s had tremendous economic problems, high levels of unemployment, and hugely depressed areas like the Midlands, Liverpool, and so on. And yet in London, there was a vibrancy that seemed to be totally out of step with what was happening nationally. At the core of this vibrancy—one of the big elements—was the ethnic community. Actually, they weren't all immigrants because some had been there for one or two generations. I suppose, most of the immigration took place in years after World War II. People in the former empire started looking for places to go, and London was popular especially among Indians and Pakistanis, and those from the Caribbean.

Q: Yeah, is it fair to say that they were members of the Commonwealth who had transferred to London, but they were not integrated into the body politic of the United Kingdom? Or truly, even, perhaps, I don't know what your observation was, the society or you know, it's possible to exist in a situation like that without actually being a part of it and having an ownership, a stake in it, beyond the salary and the money?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, the latter was the case. Actually, they were living there but were not integrated into the society. That's still true to some extent, but if you look at the composition of today’s Parliament and Government, you see how much has changed over the past four decades. Well, there were also huge race riots that went on for days. This

was not black and white like we might think of a race riot here in the United States. There were a lot of South Asians and other minorities protesting against the establishment.

British Class Distinctions

Q: Was that more class? Because Britain is an articulated, well-known, and pretty clearly defined de facto class system versus community-ethnicity system. Does that provide any explanatory insight or is that a helpful distinction even? Because you're making a very important point, it was less color than something else. What's the something else?

CLEVERLEY: It was ethnicity and class, a mixture of both. As difficult as it was in Britain to move from one class to another, one's ethnicity made the effort all the more difficult. There was always a huge lower class of non-white British.

Q: Distinguished by the way they talk, the way they dress, where they live, what they did. And Thatcher was a real challenge to that because she was a grocer's daughter who eventually arrived as head of the Conservative Party, which was the traditional highest-class party.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. She was a threat to much of the old establishment, the wealthier elements of her own system and party, as well as to working-class miners, factory workers, or union members.

Q: Well, she was a firm believer in the free market and that was—her ideological orientation was free market capitalism versus state socialism, if you will.

CLEVERLEY: After the 19th century, it wasn't just a two-class system. There was the aristocracy to begin with and most of that evolved into a liberal upper-middle class. Many of them called themselves liberals, and the Liberal Party came to be. And then, there was the lower class, the working class, which mobilized during the Industrial Revolution and became Labour.

Q: But didn't you have a middle-middle class as well as the upper-middle class?

CLEVERLEY: What we in the United States call the middle class was somewhat sandwiched between the Conservatives and Liberals, on one hand, and Labour on the other. Everyone on the top looked down on this middle-middle class and used the pejorative term “middle class” as an adjective to describe unsophisticated people who managed the shops and farms. There was stratification within the middle class, but yes, they had different interests. Margaret Thatcher was truly middle class, and that's how the uppers negatively thought of her.

Q: What we would call today upper-middle class as distinct from middle class.

CLEVERLEY: Perhaps one difference between traditional American and British class distinctions was that in America the nomenclature was based on pay, how much people

earned, which determined where they lived and so on. In Britain, it was like a badge people wore, at least in those days. Margaret Thatcher wore a “middle class” label, even if she was Prime Minister. And the people in the lower classes, in the labor class, the laborers, the workers—they hated her completely. She represented nothing good to them and still today, that is the case.

Q: Absolutely.

Immigrants in Britain

CLEVERLEY: Over the post World War II years, ethnic groups grew large and concentrated in major urban areas. They felt like they couldn't easily break through existing class barriers simply because they happened to be Indian, or from Pakistan.

Q: It was a double burden.

CLEVERLEY: It was a double burden that continues to a degree today. That's why some experts say you see more domestic Middle Eastern terrorism in Britain than in the United States.

Q: Yeah. Have you reflected, in part because of this experience or speculated or drawn any insights, as a result of observations there to our own national trials, tribulations and fractures?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I think you see more of a similarity within the African American element in society, where they feel like they've been behind forever. But if you look at our Muslim minority, you don't see the same levels of frustration because they can wear whatever they want to school. They can get jobs and be accepted quite readily.

Q: And in fairness, there are middle class, upper-middle class, even upper-class African Americans about whom you could say the same thing. Perhaps more circumscribed, perhaps more in urban northern areas than in southern areas but there is class within communities, the difference being that African Americans have a very long, from the very beginning, history here. Others have more recently arrived.

CLEVERLEY: I'll talk about this more when we talk about South Africa. Many African Americans I think carry a burden of history with them.

Q: Absolutely. As do, by the way, white southerners of a different kind.

CLEVERLEY: I sat in a restaurant in Cape Town once with some wealthy African Americans. When dinner finished, the African Americans—all men—pulled out their wallets and left a tip for the waiter. The tips made a pile of cash, hundreds of dollars. We talked about issues they carried as African Americans. The frustrations they had. And yet they had enough to leave a several hundred-dollar tip to the waiter. They were frustrated, but it wasn't because they didn't have any money.

Q: Correct, correct. I'm fascinated. Please go back. I didn't mean to interrupt there but the experience in 1986 was just so redolent with indications of things to come of a different time, same puzzles and conundrums. Please go back and finish your description of South Asians in your neighborhood, Middle Easterners in your neighborhood. Any other things you wanted to add to that.

CLEVERLEY: I think there were two groups. One was very rich people who probably had little intention of integrating into British society. They were there for a holiday or often to live six months or more, but outside British society. They brought their customs with them. Local authorities in London and elsewhere sometimes had to deal with these customs. For example, once when preparing for a feast day, some of them slaughtered a lamb in the street, with the blood going everything. Of course, everyone around was shocked.

Q: Well, particularly in England, which is infamous for its animal protection.

CLEVERLEY: In another case, a Middle Eastern woman brought a maid servant in essentially a form of slavery. At some point, the servant escaped and went to the authorities for protection. Her employer, or “owner,” could not understand what right the maid had to ask for protection. She belonged to them.

The other group, the majority of immigrants, saw Britain as a new home. They were people who worked in shops all over London and ran the place. They were happy to get the jobs and earned enough for their families to get by. So, one of the big sources of vibrancy you found in the metropolitan London area came from this workforce that was working very hard and always ready to take any job and work hard with it.

We were just in London this past December, and many things haven't changed that much since we lived there. The issue of immigration is in the background of British thinking towards the European Union. Many really hated having to take refugees from Syria and anywhere else, for that matter, from the continent. They were living with what they already had, and they didn't want more.

We in the United States have also seen anti-immigrant attitudes in the United States. We want to close the borders down, but nevertheless, just about everybody in the basic services trade—the maids, the domestics, the gardeners, the plumbers, and all—are immigrants in one form or another.

Q: I'm thinking of the area where you were, Bayswater. And it's very clear if you walk down Bayswater today, that it started as a primarily Greek immigrant community and has significantly been transformed by Persian and Near East and Lebanese families, businesses, culinary influences. And it clearly had declined economically—is on its way back up—and yet now, there is yet another layer of new or even newer immigrants coming in on top of those. Did you see that kind of dynamic or process in the area that you all were living?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, we were just off of Bayswater, near Hyde Park, two minutes from Lancaster Gate. The townhouse that the embassy was renting for us was owned by a Greek. And so, I think a lot of those bed and breakfasts you see all around Bayswater are owned by Greeks.

Q: The key, the telltale is the enormous St. Sophia's Greek Orthodox Church and property right in the middle.

CLEVERLEY: It is. And they still own a lot of that property, but they commercialized it. The property has grown much in value, and the appreciation must have made them rich. Anyway, what Greeks do very well is storing wealth in property, and they've done very well in London. A lot of Cypriot Greeks as well. And then it would be rented out or sold at much higher price to people who could afford it. Directly behind our little row of townhouses was a mews. Originally, they were stables, and now the mews have been converted into homes. The process made for an impersonal neighborhood, in a way, where it was difficult to meet people, probably for everyone else living there, as well.

Where we did meet people was at church. Our children got to know British kids and other young people at church and developed a group of friends that was outside the normal school crowd. These children were diversified in an entirely different way than those at school. If you went to the American School in London, either you had to be rich or you had to have somebody paying the bill. They were great kids and everything, but our children's experience wasn't exactly the same as someone living in central London with only expatriates in their circle.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Now, there was a time when there was a much more natural practice of a variety of faiths in the Foreign Service. And churches were, not intentionally but just organically and naturally, enormously important keys as you're describing here. Douglas and I had the same experience as Episcopalians, because there was always an Episcopal church somewhere.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I know that. And I saw that in other cities where we lived.

Q: —And I think that would surprise people about their diplomatic service.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that's true. In our congregation, they had a women's organization. It is not well known, but the Mormon Church has the oldest women's organization in the United States.

Q: Oh, tell us about that. Just briefly, I mean.

CLEVERLEY: It goes back to 1830s or the 40s and is called the Relief Society.

Q: The Relief Society.

CLEVERLEY: Relief Society was meant to give women a chance to get out of the home and away from the drudgery that so many of them knew at the time. It was run by women, and it grew to have millions of members. They try to provide material and spiritual support to sisters and families, as sometimes only women can do. I think there is often more understanding, empathy, and sympathy among women than you find with men, and Relief Society was meant to channel that support to those who needed it in different ways. Seija was asked to be president of that organization in London.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: She had about two hundred women for whom she was responsible. There were wealthy American families from the private sector. And we had a few people like us, diplomats. But there were many who really had very little, hardly anything. During the two and half years she worked in the organization, she encountered everything from murder and rape to people who were just hungry, or lonesome. She went into their kitchens to see what they had and didn't have, and then got money from the congregation to buy what they needed.

If a sister experienced some type of misfortune, Seija was called to the home on behalf of the congregation to assess the situation, give solace and comfort, and organize whatever else that could be helpful. The organization met every Sunday. There was a spiritual lesson, but also discussions on thrift or other practical self-help issues that might be useful. Some of the women hadn't really had much education. Seija made sure that people had food. If they didn't, she took resources from the congregation to buy groceries for them, sometimes giving them a lift to the supermarket. If someone died, she helped with the funeral if needed. She did that for nearly three years in a voluntary, non-paid capacity. It was an eye opener for her. It was an eye opener for me. We got an insight into how many people lived in a huge city like London.

Teenagers in the Foreign Service

The last year of our tour, our daughters Kristiina and Kaarina were in their junior year of high school. They were into music and sang with a very talented musical group. They and our son, Mika, were also involved in track and cross country. Both of our daughters did exceptionally well, one was a short distance runner, and the other was long distance and set records not only in their school but in the European International Schools network and DOD European schools. They weren't excited about going back to America after the fourth year of my tour.

Q: Was one of them about to graduate from school.

CLEVERLEY: They were both juniors to become seniors when we got to the United States.

Q: Leaving in your senior year and having to go to a new school for your last year of high school was a soul killer for teenagers.

CLEVERLEY: Seija and I tried to be sensitive to their feelings. We even let them decide whether I extended from three years to four years, or in their case, after the twins' second or third year of high school. They chose to stay in London as long as they could. We also tried something unheard of, a second extension to make it a five-year tour, through a first-person cable from the ambassador to the director general. Of course, the Department didn't buy the idea despite whatever contributions the Ambassador said I was making in the embassy.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: Perhaps I mentioned earlier that one of our daughters said, "I hate your lifestyle," when she was contemplating this move. But they had been to the theater, concerts, sung with their Madrigal group in St. Martin's in the Fields, and much more. They learned to appreciate things in a way that might not have been so easy when living in Washington or elsewhere in the United States. When they got to university, they remembered this and understood that as difficult as living abroad had often been, it also had a lot of benefits. The same daughter who said she hated our lifestyle wrote us a letter when she was at university saying how much she appreciated the opportunities her upbringing had offered.

Lessons Learned in London

As I mentioned earlier, when we could achieve a mission consensus on our issues, our cable messages and the views they expressed were impactful in Washington in the relevant agencies. I always sensed we as an embassy had more leverage in the policy making and coordinating process than any single Washington office. I don't know if embassies always appreciate that position or exploit it as much as they might.

Of all my postings, London was my favorite in terms of professional interaction and development. I left as an 01 officer working two grades above my 03 job. But my initial reckoning, that what you did with a job was more important than how it was graded, turned out to be true, for me at least.

My British counterparts were a high cut group of professionals, and in general, the British public was comfortable with world affairs. In the United States, it seems that we are still trying to cope with the idea. The petty arguments characterizing the polarization of today's politics are centered within the domestic nation, while our international position too often suffers from a vacuum of discussion and support.

National War College, Fort McNair 1988-1989

Q: Your next tour was with the National War College, how did that come about? Why did it come about? Was it tied to an ongoing assignment the way the Harvard training was? Tell us about it.

CLEVERLEY: Okay, yeah. I started searching for my next job during the fall of 1987. Larry Taylor, my supervisor in London, had attended the National War College (NWC) and encouraged me to consider it for an assignment. In a career sense, it fit well with my timing. It had been a year since my promotion to O1, and it would be a while before I would seriously compete for the next. Larry said he learned a lot at the War College and thought I would benefit from it as well. When I put my list of bids together, I included the NWC as one of them. My career counselor replied that they wouldn't consider the War College because I had attended university training. I assumed it was off the list, but then they didn't come up with anything else, and the months started passing. Finally, personnel told me they had reconsidered and were offering a year at the National War College.

I was enthusiastic about the assignment and was certain I would gain something important from the year. It was inherently different from university training in that it was a course on national military and diplomatic strategy tailored for practitioners. It was not linked to an assignment but had the advantage of being in Washington where I could easily talk to the different offices about assignments.

Q: Well, it certainly is for the military, you know. It's pretty much assumed that birds will go higher. Bird colonels will go higher but one of the requirements is NWC.

CLEVERLEY: That was often true. The National War College was established right after World War II. Eisenhower, as Commander in Chief in Europe during the last phase of the war, believed that his British counterparts had better staff work than he did. He thought they appreciated the capabilities of the other services better. His Army understood tanks; the Navy understood ships; but in modern warfare, you wanted more cross fertilization.

Q: The key to jointness, ultimately.

Perceptions and Mutual Appreciation at the War College

CLEVERLEY: That's exactly what he wanted, jointness. He needed a place where promising officers would study alongside others from the different services, jointness. So, the NWC was created after the war. When I was there, it had a student body of about two hundred officers, forty Army, forty Air Force, forty Navy and Marines, forty civilians, and a small contingent of foreign military officers. Its home was Fort McNair, located on the Potomac River in the center of Washington, D.C.

Q: Yeah, you might also note that he created the Industrial War College in the same campus to focus on the industrial side and aspect of making more.

CLEVERLEY: Absolutely, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF) was next door to us. The students were all colonel/lt. colonel, navy captain/commander-level officers.

It was natural that State civilians and military officers had much to learn about each other. But it really was true that the tank drivers didn't know much about the ship drivers. A lot of the culturalization did not happen in the classroom but in the corridors where the officers got together to chat. As we learned about each other, some of the prejudices and misperceptions transformed into firmer understandings. Everyone harbored stereotypes of the others. Take, for example, the Marines. Many of the other service officers jokingly called them "leatherheads," giving the impression that these guys were not very smart.

Q: You came in after the Richard Perle regime at DOD (Department of Defense), but you were a State officer, not just civilian but a State Department diplomat in a world of the military and DOD in particular. How did you encounter the stereotypes, the assumptions? And did you have any personal epiphanies or experiences that not only changed you but perhaps changed others as well?

CLEVERLEY: Well, yeah, we had these stereotypes in our minds, and there were those about foreign service officers, as well. When John Erlichman of Watergate fame addressed the class, he crystallized them well when one of my foreign service colleagues asked what Nixon thought of the foreign service. "Little shits, he called them," Erlichman smiled and remarked. For the rest of the year, that's how the military referred to us. Over the course, many of these stereotypes dissipated. Afterall, that was one of the college's objectives, to bring accurate perceptions and appreciations.

Q: Esprit and identity.

CLEVERLEY: Another valuable thing during the year was to see the strengths and limits of each service's capabilities. This, alone, made the year worthwhile for officers, many of whom were destined to flag commands. One day we flew in two tankers across the United States to Las Vegas. While we watched, one of them extended its boom and re-fueled the other. It was something that happens every day and is key to the projection of American air and sea power, but it really blew your mind to see it up close.

Most of us had been working hard before coming to the college. This wasn't a lazy year but compared to the intensity of the jobs many had earlier, it was a chance to turn down the volume for a few months while we learned new things. The college program took a holistic approach to the students. There was learning and networking, but there was also looking at you physically and emotionally. The years started with a bank of physicals, stress tests, and others.

The course also afforded the chance to do something that we wanted to do but hadn't been able to do for a while. A golf course stretched around the NWC building at Fort McNair. For some officers, they were able to wind down by going out to hit the ball. And I didn't blame them for that. Others had different goals for the year. Everybody had their thing that they were hoping to take out of this. What I wanted to do was to write. I wanted a chance to again take the hillside view and look down at the valley, but at a different set of issues. So, in my spare time, I got onto a word processor and wrote.

Thinking, Writing, and Publishing

I wrote three papers. For one of my classes, a NATO class, I resurrected the Finland paper that I had written at Fletcher. When at the War College we started talking about NATO and how neutrals such as Finland fit into its world, I realized again the prevalent lack of understanding about Finland's strategic position. I revisited the question of Finlandization and made it the point of my paper.

The professor liked it so much that he gave a copy to the Deputy Commandant, a senior representative from the state department. He liked it, too, enough to give a copy to a neighbor who happened to be the press attaché at the Finnish embassy. I didn't know any of this and was surprised when one day I got a call from his Finnish embassy to ask if I would mind coming to talk to them. When I arrived, they had my paper. The Finnish press attaché told how they had spent a lot of time trying to establish some nuance to the question of Finlandization, and wondered if I would be amenable to their giving a copy to some of their press contacts. I understood their frustration.

Another paper addressed the problem of technology transfer controls. The issue behind the paper was West-West frictions. People understood technology transfer controls in East-West relations, but few had paid attention to it in a West-West context. It was published by *Global Affairs* later that year.

Still another paper I wrote was on U.S. strategy after the Cold War. It wasn't a very popular topic initially. One of the reasons was that not many people accepted that the Cold War was over.

Q: I'm sorry, what was the topic again?

CLEVERLEY: U.S. strategy after the Cold War. One of the reasons it wasn't popular was that not many people accepted that the Cold War was over. There was a civilian professor of diplomacy at NWC, and when I told him I wanted to write a paper on post-Cold War strategy, he said, "That's a boring subject. People have written things like that before. And besides that, we are not in the post-Cold War world." He was ignoring that Margaret Thatcher was already using the term "post-Cold War world." To him, the Soviet Union had not fallen, nor had the Iron Curtain disappeared. But I thought it was a cutting-edge topic.

Washington's Lack of Strategic Thinking

Q: Yeah. And unfortunately, State Department has not been known for strategic thinking since Kennan [George F. Kennan].

CLEVERLEY: No one else in Washington, at least in those days, was very good at it either. I found another professor to help me. He was a young Air Force major with a PhD from Stanford. He thought my idea was a good one and offered to mentor and give me feedback along the way. When I finished and submitted it, the paper was entered into the Joint Chiefs of Staff strategy essay contest alongside entries from the various War Colleges. I didn't win but received special recognition and NDU published it as well. At the end of the year, I also won the National War College Writer's Award. I was happy because I had been able to do what I wanted to do.

Back to the idea about the dearth of strategic thinking in Washington, an informal theme during our NWC year was whether the Soviet Union had really changed. Even though it wasn't expressed as a formal topic of discussion, many of our speakers would raise it at one moment or another and sometimes address it quite extensively. Our presenters ranged from intelligence analysts to academics, to President Reagan who spoke to us at an NWC/ICAF joint gathering. Of all the speakers we had, there was only one who said the Soviet Union had fundamentally changed. All the rest repeated that it was still the same old group in Moscow, doing about the same thing as always, just looking a little bit different.

Q: Do you remember who the one was?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, the Soviet Ambassador. He said everything had changed. During the Q&A, my colleagues in the audience repeatedly challenged him on this, but he insisted it

was true. Of course, it was only a few months later that we saw how right he was. We finished the year at the end of June 1989, and within months saw the Soviet Union toppling. In our experience, no one in Washington, except perhaps the Soviets themselves, saw anything like that coming.

The Stress of Culture Shock

I would like to make a diversion here to emphasize something Foreign Service families experience continually. The excitement of living in a place like London for four years, or the opportunity to be at the War College alongside illustrious officers from the military, should always be put into the context of everything else that comes with the lifestyle. Things are not always glorious or easy.

The transfer to the National War College was a difficult transfer for us. We had twin daughters going into their senior year of high school, a son entering his junior year, and a fourth child in the eighth grade. Many things create stress in our lives. Close to the top of the list is a move from one country to another. Another is changing jobs, and another is having teenage kids. Still more: everything that comes along with teenage kids, like driving lessons. Setting up a new household is a big stress inducer. All these hit us simultaneously.

When we got to Washington, we rented an unfurnished house in Springfield and waited for our furniture that didn't come. We received our air freight but lived in an almost empty house for several weeks. We borrowed beds, sleeping bags, and other necessities from friends. I called the embassy in London and discovered they had forgotten to ship our household effects. We had several dislocations in our everyday lives. Seija had also started a job at the Department of Energy. Up to this point, she had been home most of the time when the kids were growing up, but now, she wasn't.

The other kids in high school had taken driver's ed when they were sophomores. Our three oldest missed that opportunity. With no public transportation in Springfield, our children could not participate in the normal life of teenagers without a car. Every evening when we came home, there was a list of things the kids wanted or had to do that evening. Besides that, they were totally unhappy with the move, loss of friends, and cultural shock.

Q: Because they had spent four years in one place at a very crucial time and their world was demolished overnight.

CLEVERLEY: Their lives had changed overnight, and they had difficulty dealing with it. Our daughters were top-notch runners in London, setting records among the international

schools as well as the DOD schools in Europe. But when they got to Springfield, they couldn't run because on the track so much of the competition was psychological. They were off psychologically because of the huge transitions.

This was an unnerving part of Foreign Service life, one not fully appreciated by those who don't know it personally. There was a happy ending. About two months later we had our household effects, our teenagers took private drivers ed class to get licenses and started to adjust with new friends. The other things just started to pull together. But the year was perhaps one of our most difficult assignments in our career.

Q: When we were putting together, arguing for a Family Liaison Office back in the '70s, somebody found a stress index. It was scientifically researched and derived and then a numerical value attached to it. And you could go down and you would recognize the items from everything—from the death of a father, death of a child, serious cancer diagnosis, moving, everything that you can imagine. And the idea was, you could sort of assess because you would go through and say, okay, this, this, this, and that would give you your total and there was another gradation attached to that. It was used in the argument because just a normal foreign service year left anybody average, topped out over the top on stress.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I can believe that.

Q: And it was very eye opening. These were mostly women who were involved, obviously, because it was the wives back in the old days. But that circulated and remained a part of FLO [Family Liaison Office] training for quite some time. I don't know, probably withered and disappeared like everything does, eventually. But you're simply giving a personal example of what others—studying the Foreign Service and stress—had concluded twenty years before.

CLEVERLEY: One last thing about the War College: the field trip. Everybody went on a field trip at the end of the year. We prepared for it and traveled with a small group of students to a geographic region of the world to develop expertise. We were not supposed to go to a place where we had already worked. I went to Southeast Asia, specifically the Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia, places I knew relatively little about. First, on our tour was the Philippines. We spent time in Manila and traveled into the countryside. There was an insurgency going on in Negros, a Philippine Island, when we got there. It wasn't a very good idea to send a group of American colonels, and lieutenant colonels there.

In Negros, we drove in two vans. One of them stalled with engine problems and was forced to park alongside the road. Our van continued to a sugar factory operation and then went back to pick up the others. While waiting for them to show up, the head of the factory told us that twelve armed insurgents had been there only hours before. We started worrying about our colleagues down the road, totally defenseless. Fortunately, they were quickly retrieved.

That night, when we reached the airport to fly out, it was closed, as it did every night at nine o'clock. The embassy escort officer should have known that but didn't. So, we were stuck there in the middle of this insurgency, one that was using tanks. It wasn't just a little terrorist operation. Americans were obviously targets, too. Two weeks before we got there, Col. Jim Rowe, [James "Nick" Rowe] a famous Special Forces officer, had been assassinated in Manila by Communist insurgents, in his own car. So, the threat was not hypothetical.

We had to find a hotel, but all we could find was one with two rooms for maybe twelve of us. We slept on the floor wherever we could. Surprisingly, I wasn't so worried, but some of the Army officers had long experience with these types of things before, and they were. They barricaded chairs under the doorknobs. The next morning was a holiday and the airport remained closed, so there were no planes coming on that day either. The embassy contacted the Navy, and the Navy sent a carrier plane to extract us. With the airport closed, it apparently didn't have permission to land so as the plane approached, they told us it would not stop, and would simply lower the rear door as it taxied.

Q: You had to run.

CLEVERLEY: We ran with our suitcase in hand as hard as we could and jumped onto that ramp before it went back up. We all got in and got off. So, that gave us a lot of things to think about, our "field experience" with the Philippine insurgency. The other stops in Indonesia and Singapore, were all quite eye-opening experiences, but not like that.

Q: What was your biggest takeaway? And what was in the latter, after post assignment after this, what stuck with you? What most proved valuable, proved useful or even essential about that year?

CLEVERLEY: Was the National War College experience as good as Larry Taylor led me to expect? Yes, and no. On the negative side, I think it could have been a little more vigorous in ensuring we took more substance with us at year's end. I never stressed out over a class, and as a result I could have pushed myself harder. Some of the faculty could have been stronger. My classes in military science and NATO, however, were

exceptionally good. The cross fertilization among the services worked exactly as planned. And in that regard, I learned a lot from my military colleagues. One thing that stayed with me was how well the military takes care of its people.

The Need for a Friendlier, More Flexible HR Core

Q: Yeah. To the point of getting you a plane.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, that too. The care and interest that these lieutenant colonels and colonels described in dealing with the people working underneath them, was something I hadn't experienced regularly in the State Department. I realized they had a lot that we could learn at State in terms of human resources and people management.

Q: More sense of responsibility, for starters.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, a sense of responsibility and planning this through, not just leaving, you know, the personnel system to work on its own until all of a sudden you find you have just a few officers available for certain cones or certain levels or ranks, or an overabundance in others. It seems like there's never a time of a smooth flow through.

The Foreign Service treated me well, but I wouldn't say its HR system was as effective as it needed to be. Many HR officers at working levels were simply overseeing the implementation of policies and rules. What I saw at the War College was a mind set on the part of managers. This was more fundamental than simply assuring the system worked as conceived. It was an attitude, and until foreign service managers approached the system in that way, whoever the HR officers happened to be was not the only problem. It's bigger than that.

Q: Well, in the early days, the Foreign Service, it was obligatory for foreign service officers to serve in personnel. And so, personnel in the early days were much more run by the Service than it became. Do you think the fact that foreign service officers ceased accepting those because it wasn't promotable, it wasn't chic, it wasn't this, it wasn't that. And it was foreign service officers who basically turned it over to somebody else. Do you think it would have made a difference if there had been more foreign service accountability, responsibility in personnel? Or was the system itself the problem or the culture? I don't know. I'm not quite sure how to ask the question but I guess it's a—why do you think that was the case?

CLEVERLEY: I don't believe it is effective or sensitive to turn the Foreign Service's HR over to civil servants who have not served abroad, have no personal experience with the issues associated with working abroad, or who have not worked within the foreign

service system which is inherently unfriendly. The foreign service promotion process is a zero-sum game. Your promotion is my lack of a promotion, and my lack of promotion often limits my assignment options. That all introduces a tension in the career and assignment process, and sometimes in everyday life. That may not exist so much in the civil service where a grade has to do with position. In my experience it was therefore essential to have a smooth and fair HR process to achieve a smooth and effective Foreign Service.

I served as a DCM three times, and a great share of the problems I had most often to deal with were associated with HR. Too often, the issue was with a post HR officer who was not a Foreign Service Officer, or with an HR office back in Washington. However, the issue was not always a purely HR one. Sometimes it was associated with those drafting and implementing management policy – travel policy, housing policy, training, or other types of policies – who were not sufficiently empathetic to the issues that families or individuals faced when they were abroad. Indirectly, these types of management processes and policies often turned into HR issues, because of the problems they could create for employees or their families.

Sometimes, Washington management made and/or implemented policies that were simply a pain in the butt from the point of view of someone living abroad, sometimes not even cost effective. For example, travel restrictions. At various times while I was in the service, we were banned from traveling with a foreign carrier, had to surrender frequent flier miles, were required to make out-of-the way travel itineraries, had to buy refundable tickets only, were forced to take excessively long itineraries without an upgrade or break, and so on. I saw how some of these policies cost the Department more money than if the rules would have had more flexibility – to say nothing of the inconvenience or sheer stress they caused Foreign Service employees and their families. It seemed there was always someone back in the Department worried that somebody out in field was living too rich a life or getting some kind of advantage that they didn't deserve. Somehow, somewhere in the system, we need to have a friendlier core to help people deal with issues involved with living abroad.

Q: And, just making it efficient and working, so that somebody doesn't forget to send your shipment out, or send the orders that say send the shipment, Because a lot of that originates in Washington too.

Well, about that, our times up now. And you knew you were going to Athens by March, did you say? You found an assignment as an economic counselor and that's your first tour in Greece. Did you have to learn Greek before you departed?

CLEVERLEY: Let's start with that.

Q: Okay, thank you very much and I'll see you on Friday.

Q: This is Stephanie Kinney on March 11, 2022, continuing the interview and oral history with Michael Cleverley. Last session, he was about to finish up the National War College and had an assignment mid-year. He clarified that he would be going to Athens so he knew where he was going. Michael, is there anything more about the National War College year or indeed about London, because London was a very lengthy assignment and we may not have done full justice to it.

Athens, Greece 1989-1993

So, why don't we start by picking up any threads that have been left hanging, and then we will proceed with your graduation from the National War College, and the family's transfer to Athens. And at least settling in, in the first year of that. See how far we get today.

CLEVERLEY: Okay, that's fine.

Q: Yeah. That's a wonderful, wonderful truth of real diplomatic service, real diplomatic life, and real American diplomats, which often gets overlooked or is just so unimaginable to people that they don't even know to ask the question. So, that's a really very valuable dimension and contribution. How more about National War College, anything to wrap up or add to that year? And then we'll move on to Athens. This was your first tour in Athens, and what was your position going to be?

CLEVERLEY: I was assigned to be Counselor for Economic Affairs. Over the course of the War College year, maybe February, March, I saw the economic counselor position at embassy Athens was opening during the summer of 1989. I talked to the desk about the job. They liked me, and I liked them, and I began to pursue the assignment. Part of the problem was that it was a language designated position, and the officer whom I was succeeding faced mandatory retirement. They needed somebody quickly, but they didn't have anyone who was a Greek speaker. And they didn't have anybody at that point who wanted to spend a lot of time in Greek training.

I agreed to take some Greek language after the year at the NWC was over, but there was not a lot of time: I was assigned to FSI Greek for three weeks. It was one-on-one and very intensive. Greek was an incentive language so that if you got at least a 1+/1+, you received a pay incentive. I decided to apply myself seriously in this short course to see how much I could learn. And at the end, I did get a 1+/1+. In practice that meant that I knew a lot of words, but I didn't have a lot of fluency. So, we appeared in Athens in the beginning of July.

Q: You arrived with the children and the whole family and all your household belongings?

CLEVERLEY: And a dog. We arrived in Athens at the beginning of July 1989. The officer I was replacing was not happy about having to leave the Foreign Service. He had the right to stay until the 30th of September if he wished, and he exercised that right. The embassy put us into temporary housing. It also gave me a local Greek teacher and went back to FSI arguing for money to put me into a class. FSI was not terribly sympathetic, but it eventually provided a grant to put me on an intensive language course for another three weeks at a place called the Athens Centre. Three weeks, of course, was three weeks. It was not very long, but at least it was intensive, and I was in country, which was a lot better than doing it in Washington. Greek was a hard language that usually required at least forty-four weeks of full-time FSI language training. The six I got, though helpful, were still inadequate. I never became as fluent as I wanted, but I did get my capability up to a 3/3 by the end of the tour.

Q: Wow, that's wonderful though, because it is a hard language.

CLEVERLEY: It was a lot harder than I thought.

Q: Well, you were working in another alphabet as well.

CLEVERLEY: The post gave me the Sinclair Language Award for this. The DCM and the language officer nominated me. I didn't want it, really, because I did not think I deserved it. I didn't think I spoke Greek well enough. But they wanted to put somebody up for the award, and the Greek I learned came under difficult circumstances. That's what they were trying to highlight. By the end of September when my predecessor finally departed the post, I had some more Greek, had had a chance to meet some people, and was ready to start.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

Greece 1989

CLEVERLEY: By the end of September when my predecessor finally departed post, I was ready to take charge. I had received some more Greek, and I had had a chance to meet some people. Let me just talk a little bit about Greece in 1989, what it was like.

Q: Yes, thank you, that's very important. Set the context for us.

CLEVERLEY: The summer of 1989, Andreas Papandreou, the longtime prime minister, was voted out of office. Papandreou was the founder of a movement called the Panhellenic Socialist Party, PASOK for short. It was a social democratic type of party, probably more left than many other European social democratic parties. Two Communist parties, one which considered Stalin a champion of the people, joined together in a common ballot that election. The three leftist parties made for a very powerful left in Greece, and Andres Papandreou led from the left.

Q: If one party was Stalin's, what was the other communist party?

CLEVERLEY: It sat somewhere between a Stalinist and a Eurocommunist party, not so extreme as the Stalinists.

Q: Yeah. Would it be fair to characterize them as Stalinist and Eurocommunist, because that's a real distinction.

CLEVERLEY: I suppose that works. In the 1989 election, the combined communist parties only got about 13 percent of the vote, so the communists alone did not have a dominating weight. But people paid attention to them because they had a large influence even among PASOK's supporters, and Papandreou, himself. It's important to remember that 1989, when I arrived in Athens, was barely forty years since the communists nearly took over the country in Greece's civil war. The legacy of those bad times had hardly disappeared. It is also good to remember that PASOK came to power after the *junta*, a right-wing military dictatorship that had run the country from 1967 to 1974. PASOK was in a certain sense a reaction to the dictatorship. It mobilized the left vote, picking up voters from former communist voters. PASOK was a viable party that could govern.

Q: Yeah. Did the old military regime supporters have a party or play any kind of proportional influence in the post dictatorship political arena? Or did they split and melted into the PASOK and the communist parties.

CLEVERLEY: The leaders of the military regime were put in prison. But the others initially probably migrated toward the party on the conservative side called New Democracy.

Q: New Democracy, aha.

CLEVERLEY: Many rightists would have been comfortable in New Democracy. Then there were some small, very small rightist parties on the far right. Papandreou pretty much staffed the military with people who had not been associated with the Junta, at least at the senior ranks.

Papandreou had first been imprisoned by the military regime but was eventually released and fled to Stockholm. He apparently saw how well Sweden's social welfare state catered to the working classes and wanted to create something similar in Greece.

Unfortunately, Greece couldn't afford the one he put together while Prime Minister. One big difference between Sweden and Greece was money. Sweden had money and tax revenues to support a welfare state and Papandreou's Greece didn't. Much of the program PASOK put together was financed on debt. So, by the time he left office in June of 1989, and I was arriving the next month, the country was in a terrible economic state. The debt/GDP [Gross Domestic Product] ratio was over a hundred percent.

Q: Whoa.

CLEVERLEY: Huge deficits and so on.

Q: Although we are getting there.

The Greek Civil War's Legacy

CLEVERLEY: And being on the left, he also knew he could gain points with the left by confronting the United States or Europe, but particularly the United States. Let me just add one other point here, this is a little farther back in history, but it is really relevant for Greece in this period. Greece's civil war right after World War II was very bloody and very ugly.

Q: Roughly what decade?

CLEVERLEY: In the late 1940s. So, much of the left that existed in Papandreou's day was a residual from that period. Many people who fought in the civil war were still living. I suppose the majority of the people who fought in that civil war were still alive when he was elected. The communists were more favorable to a leftist government, and Papandreou worked to rehabilitate them politically. So, there wasn't just a leftist orientation like we found in Italy, but a tremendous well of bitterness and anger, and memory.

Q: Yeah, memory endures. And particularly, five minutes of fame politicians tend to forget. Longevity is not helpful to you as a politician.

CLEVERLEY: So, he exploited this leftist sentiment and this bitterness, this polarization. It was something like we have seen in the United States recently.

Q: Did you end up with my enemy's enemy is my friend, triangular dynamic as a result? Is that what I am hearing or?

CLEVERLEY: And the number one enemy for a lot of people then was the United States – perhaps for a majority of people. If anything went wrong, it was always the Americans. We were the responsible patron. This had major consequences for our bilateral relationship as well as with embassy operations, such as security. I will talk more about this shortly.

Q: Yes, yes. Very important distinction, with consequences. Different consequences.

CLEVERLEY: Greece from about year 1500 on had been under the Turkish Empire until it gained its independence in the 19th century. It did not go through the Reformation, it didn't go through the Renaissance transformations. It didn't go through the Enlightenment. It didn't go through the Industrial Revolution. It didn't go through all of

the things that Italy, just a few miles away, went through before emerging in the 20th century. This had consequences.

Q: I think a lot of the West focuses on classical Greece, and they forget that it was Ottoman for hundreds of years. I think the only museum, or the one that most brings that viscerally into focus for a lot of people is the Benaki Museum because of the dioramas.

CLEVERLEY: I think in a way, the British and other Europeans in the 1800s, who harkened back to ancient Greece and saw Greece as the heir to these great democratic traditions, did Greece a disservice. And this, too, had consequences because the Greeks themselves started thinking of themselves as the heirs to the great ancient Greek democracy. And yet few of the features of classical Greek democracy existed in 1990s Greece.

Q: What do you mean by that?

CLEVERLEY: Well, the Greece that I encountered was essentially run by corruption. The ancient Greeks' enlightened ideas and practices, institutions, did not exist in Greece until very recent years. And yet there was a hubris among Greeks that they "were" there, and they didn't have to "get" there. That created problems for them in many different types of ways. So, for example, if you asked Greeks whether Greece belonged to Europe, you were likely to get a response like, "No, Europe belongs to Greece." It sounds absurd, but the practical implications from the thought could greatly complicate Greece's relations within the European Union.

Q: Europe belongs to Greece. Help us understand that.

CLEVERLEY: Because Greek democratic ideas and practices were bedrock in Europe. If you mean the ancient Greeks, you can see some truth in that. But if you equate modern to ancient Greece, you find some problems. They put themselves in a kind of privileged position, almost a self-righteous position, that filtered over into their relationships with the European Union, the European neighbors, and the United States. The Greek mentality, moreover, was extremely different from western mentality. And it was often very difficult for many of us at the embassy, or for any American for that matter, to really understand the Greek mentality. The mixture of an Ottoman past with their illusions of Greek glory produced attitudes which were quite difficult for us to dissect and understand.

Macedonia's Legacy

A good example of that might be Macedonia. After the Cold War, Yugoslavia disintegrated and Macedonia, one of the provinces above northern Greece, declared independence as the Republic of Macedonia. The Greeks went ballistic over the name. How could they call themselves "Macedonians," when Macedonia was part of ancient Greece? It was one of the most problematic issues during my first tour in Greece. It was difficult for us to understand why the Greeks were so angered. And it was impossible for

them to understand why we didn't see their point. A million people demonstrated over the issue in Thessaloniki one day. In another case, our consul general in Thessaloniki was virtually confined to his residence for a few weeks over a fairly inconsequential statement that he didn't think would be offensive to the Greeks.

Q: In front of the embassy, or were these not United States Embassy centric, but public manifestations in the central plaza kind of thing.

CLEVERLEY: Well, both. The million-person demonstration that I am talking about was just in the center of Thessaloniki, not oriented towards America. But we had to tread gingerly and be careful with the words we chose. I have a big collection of golden Macedonian stars. Many people I met gave me one so I could wear it on my lapel, or put it on our mantle, because Greece was Macedonia. Macedonia belonged to Greece, and they wanted America to understand that.

Q: Because of Alexander?

CLEVERLEY: Alexander lived in Macedonia and Alexander was a Greek (although I have heard that debated). And Greece traditionally extended to Macedonia over two millennia ago. For any country to call itself "Macedonia" was unthinkable to a Greek. But you know, to an American mind, if they are not creating problems for you as a country, what real difference does it make what they call themselves. And that's pragmatically how America would usually relate to the issue. That was totally inconceivable to a Greek, and I asked many Greeks.

Q: On any part of the political spectrum?

CLEVERLEY: Any part. I would ask my Greek friends if they could explain to me why there's so much emotion on this issue. And they would explain it and it just didn't make sense to me, or to most of us (Americans) in the embassy, to the Dutch – whose minister's comments on the matter spawned a spontaneous boycott of Dutch products in Greece – or to most anyone else in the EU. So, we had these types of attitudinal and cultural differences. The State Department had recognized for many years that the attitudes in Greece were fundamentally more problematic than elsewhere in Europe. It was useful, therefore, to staff the embassy with policy people who knew Greece. There were a lot of two timers, sometimes three timers like Tom Miller. He was assigned three times to Greece, as a political officer, as DCM and as ambassador. And that was not uncommon. Most of the ambassadors then were career ambassadors.

Andreas Papandreou's Legacy

Andreas Papandreou would exploit this cultural cleavage to the extent that it was almost unbearable for the United States. We were talking about Jim Goodby earlier. Jim Goodby was nominated to be the United States ambassador to Greece in the late 1980s. The embassy asked for agrément, and Papandreou never gave it. He never said no, he never said yes, and just left it hanging. Eventually, Goodby's name was withdrawn. So, the

question was whether Papandreou was doing this just to infuriate us? And he probably was.

Papandreou threatened to leave NATO and overall made the environment so miserable in the business community that American companies could hardly do business there. When I started making my rounds of calls in Washington before departing for Greece, no matter where I went, the Department of Defense, the Department of Commerce or wherever, no one could say a good word about Greece. They all had strong negative perceptions of Greece because they had had so many unpleasant experiences in their workings with Greece under the Papandreou years.

Q: Sort of a daunting prospect to be being sent out to interpret or explain things.

CLEVERLEY: I had never encountered anything like it before. It took over a year to get a permanent government in place after Papandreou lost the election in June 1989, but eventually Konstantinos Mitsotakis formed a New Democracy-led government. He was from Crete. He clearly understood where Greece stood with Europe and the United States and wanted to rehabilitate the country to become a reliable western partner and ally. The United States wanted to help. With a new leader to work with, we thought it was important to support what he was trying to do. Much of my first tour in Greece was aimed at rebuilding the relationship between our two countries.

It was very complex to do diplomacy in Greece. First of all, the United States was blamed for so many things the Greeks thought were going wrong, no matter what they were. Once when there was a hospital strike, for example, the doctors and nurses demonstrated in front of the American Embassy, like their grievance was our fault.

Unchecked Urban Terrorism

And then there were the continued attacks of an urban terrorist organization called 17 November. It took its name from a date, 17 November, during the junta when students were allegedly killed by police during a university protest. The 17 November terrorist group, like many others in Greece, saw the United States as the power behind the junta. Its first victim in 1975 was station chief Richard Welch, who was gunned down in his driveway, in Athens.

Q: So, this is a long standing and pretty established, networked, factored, dynamic, whatever you want to call it, by 1989 or had it withered?

CLEVERLEY: No, it was in its heyday in 1989.

Q: It was at its apogee in 1989.

CLEVERLEY: It was small and well put together, effective. None of them were arrested or convicted for decades. They killed or wounded scores of people. When I arrived, there

had been seven official Americans killed, military and embassy, and about thirty wounded over the previous fifteen years.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: So, it was something to be taken very seriously.

Q: Whoa. Is it fair—what I'm hearing, at least in its early days, is some sort of generational factor? Students are younger. Were the foot soldiers younger? Who was the leadership? Was it an intellectual left leadership? Was it a whole different animal from the traditional left-right context? Help us understand a little bit more the generational and leadership aspects of this force, which grows over fifteen years by the time you were there. Help us understand a little bit more about that.

CLEVERLEY: Well, in 1989 when I arrived, no one knew. We knew their typical modus operandi. We had a lot of law enforcement and intelligence activities trying to establish some facts about the group.

Q: But hadn't our intelligence established that?

CLEVERLEY: They had spent a lot of time researching the organization and had some theories. But even later, when I returned on my second tour in 2000, our agencies were not much farther along than they were then.

Q: Wow. Interesting.

CLEVERLEY: Many people, including many in the embassies, believed that 17 November had a connection to Papandreou's government, or that it had some type of unofficial protection from Papandreou. I suppose from Papandreou's point of view, terrorist agitation wasn't necessarily a bad thing. And some of his enemies could be taken care of in the process. I don't know. Maybe I'll talk more about it when we get to my second tour because I was there when the Greek government started to round them up.

Q: Fascinating.

CLEVERLEY: What they knew at that time was how they normally operated. In one type of operation, someone on a motorcycle came alongside the victim's vehicle in traffic holding a 9mm handgun, usually the same gun. They would assassinate their target and zoom off into traffic. They also used rockets. Not long before I arrived, they had planted an armor piercing rocket down the street from our defense attaché, William Nordeen. When he left in the morning for the embassy, the rocket blew his vehicle to pieces. I understand his sixteen-year-old daughter was the first one out on the street after the explosion. After she saw what happened to her father, it was years before she could speak. The girl began riding and through horses was able to finally come to grips with the tragedy and regain her ability to talk.

When I arrived, Athens was a fifteen percent differential post. The differential was connected to the air pollution, which was actually pretty bad. There were days when no vehicles were allowed in the center of the city because of the smog. But the differential should have more rightly been danger pay. The Department, it seemed, did not want to offend the Greek government by officially naming Athens a danger pay post. There was some precedent to this. A couple years earlier the Department had put out a travel advisory saying Greece was a dangerous destination for Americans due to rampant Middle Eastern and domestic urban terrorism. Because the Greek economy depended strongly on tourism, the old advisory and fear of a new one plagued our bilateral agenda much of the time I was there on my first assignment.

Q: Like Mexico City. Don't want to offend the government on the actual account so you blame it on the environment.

CLEVERLEY: That was the Greece that met me when I arrived.

Q: That's an invaluable context. Thank you. Now, what kind of housing did you move to in September? Was it an apartment? Was it a house? Was it part of a Greek neighborhood? Was it part of a diplomatic enclave? How did that work?

CLEVERLEY: No, Greece was one of those posts where after World War our government picked up a lot of real estate at low prices. One of the houses they bought was a beautiful old mansion type home with a fascinating history to it. The Archbishop of Athens had once lived in it. And then, there were different rumors about what had happened during the war. There was one rumor that the Nazi Gestapo had set up headquarters there, and another one that the resistance had used it.

During our second tour, Seija and I met a man whose grandfather built it. They were a rich merchant family with a department store in the center of Athens. During the war and the Nazi occupation, a lot of the family lived there because they had a place to grow a garden. Much of the city was starving. The home was a well-known landmark, in a near suburb of Athens. After the embassy purchased it, it became the residence of the USAID [United States Agency for International Development] chief. When USAID shut down, it was used by the economic counselor. We were very excited to move in even though we had to wait until September 30 when my predecessor and his family moved out.

Ambassador Michael Sotirhos

A new ambassador to Greece arrived about the same time I did, Michael Sotirhos. He was a Greek American from New York City who mobilized Greek American votes for George H.W. Bush during that election. He spoke fluent Greek, and he wanted all of his meetings in Greek. He often distrusted the embassy staff and especially foreign service national employees thinking they didn't know anything. Greece was a complex place that he as a Greek American understood.

Q: Because he was Greek American. Was that accurate because he was Greek American? Or was it asserted because he was Greek American?

CLEVERLEY: Maybe a little of both, but he asserted it vocally. Of course, there were a lot of people at the embassy, myself included, who when they arrived met a very steep learning curve. He certainly knew a lot more than I did, but maybe not as much as he thought he did, and he definitely didn't know what an embassy was, exactly. He thought we were bloated and needed to be trimmed back in size. He went to church every Sunday. He wanted to be seen there as a show of his affinity to Greek culture. Greek orthodoxy and Hellenism – things that were almost synonymous in the minds of many of the people we needed to work with.

Q: And that would be the Greek Orthodox Church? The main Greek Orthodox Church in Athens or a neighborhood?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, in any neighborhood. He went to a different church every time. And he spoke Greek because he thought the Greeks would appreciate that. And they did. I was impressed to see how he became almost immediately a celebrity. Now remember, this was a country with an ambivalence towards the United States. But he was as much a celebrity as an American might be in that environment. When sitting next to him on the backseat of his Cadillac and driving through town, I saw many times how crowds of people along the street admiringly turned to notice Sotirhos.

Q: You always had the flag on the car? Or did they just even recognize the car?

CLEVERLEY: We always had the flags flying. Sotirhos insisted. No recent ambassador had used the flags because security thought it was a better counter terrorist measure to not have flags flying. The folly of that, of course, was anytime we were in a big black Cadillac in the center of Athens, who else was it going to be?

Q: There's that too. Did the Cadillac have a seal on it? Or like only the flags?

CLEVERLEY: Only the flags.

Q: How about the dip [diplomatic] plate?

CLEVERLEY: We switched off all plates for non-CD numbers. We didn't want to have a dip plate on any American Embassy car, on anybody's car.

Q: Yeah, yeah. But you rode with the flag.

CLEVERLEY: He rode with the flags. Sotirhos eventually became controversial because part of the problem with thinking you know as much as Greeks, when you were really not a Greek, was that in the end you were still an American.

Q: Yeah, and the reality there is, ultimately and finally, in the global scheme of things, you are an American.

CLEVERLEY: He would get criticized by the Greeks for two things: one, he was a Greek American who thought he knew more than they did. And two, if he was a Greek American, why didn't he do more to get the United States to do all of these things on their long list that any good Greek wanted the United States government to do? The reality was that Sotirhos was truly an American. I never noticed a case where I thought he favored Greece because of his ethnic background. He favored American points of view, positions, and interests.

Q: And I think, this is you have captured something that is signal, quintessential, central, to whatever we do in forming and training our diplomats for the future and educating the public. You've just said something very, very profound, rarely captured in chatter.

CLEVERLEY: It was, it is important. We do need to know the interests of our host countries and be sympathetic to them when possible. But we have to never forget what our own interests are and make sure that we are never accused of too much favoring the host country.

Q: It was always in terms of [_____]. But in a world of hyphens, it becomes an emotional, intellectual and easily manipulated factor. And we are going to have a real challenge in navigating that. Well, we already are, but going forward, it's not going to go away anytime soon now because it's so much a part of everything. So much a part of the language for the foreseeable future.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. Advocacy for your host is a two-edged sword. I mean, it does have to be used by an embassy that is there on the ground, but in the right way.

Q: Why?

CLEVERLEY: Back to Sotirhos, a lot in the embassy disliked him. He was a bit of a tyrant, arrogant, and insulting. His view that the embassy was bloated was not correct. It was a big embassy because of the civil war and the role the United States played then and later. It had about a thousand employees, and the consulate in Thessaloniki may have had sixty, mostly national employees. And then we had a huge strategic relationship with the military. The United States Air Force had a large base in Athens, our Navy had a large anchorage and airfield in Crete, and there were other bases in the country. What he thought was bloated was essentially our effort to deal with a country that was off the mainstream as far as many countries in Europe were concerned, but central to American interests in NATO and the Mediterranean. We needed both linguistic and cultural depth on the embassy staff, and a serious outreach program in the community, both in public policy and commercially. We were out there trying to help our companies get into the market.

He didn't recognize that, and at one point tried to cut back the size of the embassy in one day by a large percentage of the national employees. It was a horrible scene. Imagine, people who had worked there for years and told the next morning that they had been let go. This was something that would have been difficult anywhere in Europe, but in Greece it was a head-on collision with the way the country culturally thought and worked.

Q: Oh my god. I want you—appropriately now or if you want to do it later—you're putting on the table something very enduring and critical, the short-term, self-appointed knowledge expert who comes in and judges, in this case it's bloated, against the long-term reality of how long change actually takes and investment takes. In other, long term versus short term investment, if you want to put it in financial terms. Am I correct that the AID [USAID] mission is part of the implementation and execution of the Marshall Plan? Which I think Greece has a lot to do with—the development of the concept and the execution as a major, you know, proving ground or priority. Can you speak to that?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I agree. This wasn't the only time I have seen this type of thing, where an ambassador coming from the business world looks at an embassy without truly understanding what everybody does, and thinks it is oversized or not as effective as it should be. An ambassador from the business world often believes they have business acumen and experience that will quickly turn things around. And the thing is that almost every ambassador wants to leave their mark and expects their mark is going to make it a more efficient U.S. diplomatic presence. Now, as far as USAID in Greece was concerned, they were phased out long before I got there. But it was very much involved with the Marshall Program and other things as Greece started to recover from the civil war and develop economically.

Sotirhos was one coming in from the business community, who had built up an empire in furniture and design in New York City. He had confidence in his ability to manage, and he thought that those skills were transferable to the diplomatic establishment. Many others do the same thing. It creates a tremendous amount of friction within the mission and often with the DCM who is supposed to provide the experience. I wasn't DCM [deputy chief of mission] so I was insulated, but the DCMs who were there, I know, had a lot of frustrations.

Q: Yeah. Who were your DCMs during this period?

CLEVERLEY: Jim Williams was the second and Ed Cohen was the first. They were good officers and did as best they could under someone like Michael Sotirhos. But he created trouble for them and others. He would insult people without thinking and was abrasive.

It was good to have a change in prime ministers and American ambassadors at the same time. Sotirhos wanted the best for Greece, and he wanted to support closely Mitsotakis's efforts to get the country going again.

Real Threats and Tight Security

In terms of my experience in the embassy, I want to return to terrorism just for a moment. The post was a critical threat post. At that time, I'm sure it was the most dangerous post in Europe, especially for senior officers. The assumption was that senior officers were at more of a risk than junior personnel. Certainly, those killed, the defense attaché and the station chief, had been senior. There were a lot of precautions to offset the threat.

We also had continuous demonstrations in front of the embassy. During my second tour—and this was probably true during the first time as well—our Marine security guard had more reacts than any other post in Europe. They were having, I think on average, at least one “react” every ten days, or something like that. Which means the marine guards were being mobilized because of some threat, whether a bomb, or a demonstration outside by the gates, or whatever it happened to be. So, everything was on edge all of the time, as far as terrorism was concerned.

Fortunately, the *modus operandi* of the terrorists, driving up to your car in an intersection and shooting you through the window, allowed us to prepare for and minimize the threat. For example, varying your routes to work could be effective. Using armored vehicles was also quite valuable for that type of threat. Our drivers learned evasive counter terrorist type driving. The embassy transported many officers to work in an armored shuttle service, home to office and back.

What we learned eventually was that 17 November would stalk a person for up to two months before attempting an assassination. You can try to make stalking and the implementation of an attack very difficult. Unfortunately, it was a zero-sum game. We were trying to make American diplomats harder to get than someone else. But it was a major challenge for Embassy Athens during those years.

Q: Yeah. When did it begin to wither or end?

CLEVERLEY: Probably about 2003.

Q: 2003, yeah. So, just to take terrorism as one factor in the play, how long was Sotirhos there? Two years, four years?

CLEVERLEY: He was there four years. Counterterrorism was a big initiative for Sotirhos, especially in regards to better law enforcement. The police had been gutted after the junta. The quality of investigation was very low. When there was an attack, the police didn't even know how to isolate the crime scene. They didn't know how to gather the evidence. They didn't know how to put it all together. We didn't have an FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] office then, but Sotirhos started lobbying and ended up getting an FBI section in Athens. In the beginning, their main purpose was to track the terrorists and to assist the police in putting together better crime techniques. We would send police to the United States to train them.

Q: And that's a kind of cultural exchange. A different kind of cultural exchange.

CLEVERLEY: It was a cultural exchange. The Greeks actually liked it. They liked it because they thought that we were serious in what we were doing. And they were not sure their own government was. The police wanted to be serious.

Economic and Commercial Diplomacy in the Early 90s

So, why don't I move forward a little bit and go into my section, what I was doing there. The economic section was in the chancery. I had an O2 officer working for me and a rotational junior officer over the course of the time I was there. I had a management assistant who managed the office. We had a local employee section with two senior FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals], as we then called them, and another office assistant who was also a local hire. We relied on our nationals because for one thing we didn't have a lot of Americans.

With Greece a member of the European Union, embassy Athens got all of the cable traffic and requests that went to other capital embassies in the EU. For the most part, we were expected to handle the same economic instructions and requests going to Bonn or London with their many officers. There were just two or three of us, and it got very busy. We utilized our local hires to mitigate the load.

Q: Were these local hire employees, Foreign Service nationals of the era, long term? You said you had two—the two of them were senior so I am assuming that a lot of local staff had been working relatively how long for the United States Embassy?

CLEVERLEY: Both of the senior ones had worked at the embassy over twenty years. However, their grades were set by the level of responsibility they carried, not by years in grade. They were at the top of the grade schedule. So, they were some of the more senior people in the embassy local staff.

Q: They had seen a lot of Americans come and go.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that's right, for better or worse.

One of the ambassador's goals was to encourage foreign investment from American firms into Greece. The ambassador was there to play a role in this, ready to speak to anybody, anytime, any conference, whatever. That was refreshing for me as an economic officer because my experience during the years before was that the ambassador was used mainly for political purposes, but this was a new attitude: ambassadors could be used as advocates for American business. That was welcome.

We recognized the importance of helping the Greek economy get to its feet by implementing reforms and after Papandreou's years, re-establishing the country's commitment to markets. There were two long-standing problems in the Greek economy that incidentally were very much behind the collapse of the Greek economy a few years ago and still are there: corruption and tax evasion. We led an attack on both, starting with

a cooperative arrangement with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). People from the IRS actually worked in the Ministry of Finance helping them put together a more effective tax system.

Q: Did he create a new function in the embassy with IRS seconded from the United States? Or did you just have a steady stream of IRS experts, visits etc.?

CLEVERLEY: This was a steady stream on contract with Greece paying for it. I don't know if they were paying a hundred percent. Mitsotakis, the prime minister, certainly welcomed anything to enhance the efficiency of tax collection.

Q: Yeah, there is a certain buy-in there but was it also because there wasn't money in the budget to do such as that on the U.S. side or will or interest?

CLEVERLEY: There was a will but there wasn't a lot of money. I arrived in 1989, in the summer, and you recall the Soviet Union collapsed over the next two years. The result of this was the mistaken thought in Washington that since the Cold War seemed to be over, the State Department did not need to be funded as it had been in the past. I remember, the assistant secretary of EUR boasting that he was able to manage the opening of several embassies in the former Soviet republics without asking for a penny extra in his bureau budget!

Q: And that came directly from the secretary of state at the time, James Baker, who famously refused to give a penny more for the country to open embassies—was it twenty-eight new countries? That was the fallout of the breakup of the Soviet empire.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. So, there wasn't a lot of money in Washington. The people trying to deal with the everyday finances of diplomacy were struggling. The money was stretched as far as it could go. Sotirhos could call Baker, and Baker would answer the phone. But Sotirhos's influence was limited.

Anti-corruption was another issue that we tried to emphasize in various ways. And unfortunately, none of it was very successful. In the end, we did not succeed in getting a lot of new American foreign direct investment into Greece. The overall business environment was too unfriendly. Tax evasion continued, as well as corruption. And Mitsotakis' government and administration were as guilty as those before, as far as corruption was concerned.

Q: These are long, long, long term issues and challenges and problems in a short-term world.

CLEVERLEY: It was especially long standing in Greece reaching at least as far back as the years of Ottoman rule—they call it “the occupation,” you know, four hundred years of tyranny. The Ottomans tried to destroy Greek culture, and the Greeks to their credit, resisted, preserving their language and culture through the Orthodox Church and to a

great extent through patronage. This patronage, of course, translates as a way of doing business through what we call today corruption.

Q: Well, it was a very personalized, carefully selected, my family, my extended family, and my trusted—and you couldn't go much beyond that, so, there was nothing institutional about that.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. And ultimately, that is just a form of corruption that prevents the market and meritocracy from operating effectively.

Other issues that we followed very closely were energy and gas, particularly in the Aegean Sea. There was a reason for this. First, the largest U.S. investment in Greece was in a consortium called the North Aegean Petroleum Corporation that was dominated by Canadian investors but had Americans as a big part of it. The Greeks pumped natural gas out of the Aegean, but it was a problematic area because of the conflict between Greece and Turkey over where the territorial shelf ended. Turkey did not join the Law of the Sea [LOS], so there was no hope the treaty would resolve the differences.

For the two countries, it was a political-military issue as much as economic. The Greeks exercised their rights over what the LOS considered Greek territorial waters and tried to exploit them. The Turks sometimes tried to do the same according to their own isolated definition. A couple of times they nearly went to war, and this was something unthinkable for the United States, especially since they both belonged to the transatlantic alliance. We felt we had a stake in this potentially dangerous conflict.

Q: Yeah. How did anybody know that this was worth doing? That there was oil and gas out there? Was that a known, was it an unknown? Was it a possibility, probability?

CLEVERLEY: When I arrived in 1989, the North Aegean Petroleum Company had been exploring and pumping for a number of years off a north Aegean island near Thessaloniki. The first month on the job, I made a good contact who was the head of the Greek state gas exploration company. We kept close contact over the years, and he and his wife became some of our oldest and closest friends in Greece. The Greeks were doing active exploration to find underwater gas and oil deposits. Obviously, they hoped to find those they could exploit without a conflict with Turkey. The entire affair was big for us.

We had a lot of other American firms facing market, governmental or judicial impediments. It was very difficult for an American company to work in the environment that the Greeks, and especially Papandreou, had created. Bureaucratic and judicial issues, suits and more, made it extremely difficult. I don't think I met a single American company operating in Greece that hadn't had a problem.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: Where we could promote American commercial interests with the greatest chance of success, we spend a lot of effort.

Q: Could you give us some specifics as examples to provide a better idea of what kinds of most relevant or most opportunity-filled U.S. investment sectors or products we are talking about at this particular time, other than energy? You know, was it textiles? Was it foodstuffs? Was it franchises? Was it pharmaceuticals? Pharmaceuticals is one, give us a few more specific examples if you could.

CLEVERLEY: One area was privatization. Another was projects. Mitsotakis wanted to privatize large sectors of the economy that had been nationalized under Papandreou or before. Sometimes there were American companies interested in picking up an investment. The U.S. company ultimately had to get a Greek partner in order to navigate the bureaucracy. Then there was the corruption. And of course, American firms were restrained by our Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and couldn't bribe anyone without fear of getting prosecuted in the United States for that. So after a lot of effort and time bidding for a project, the American firm would lose the bid to a firm not averse to greasing the skids. And then—

Q: So, did that result in finesses, fixers, that sort of thing?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, yes.

Q: Or was it a range of ways to cope with the legal mandate?

CLEVERLEY: Sometimes, things would be finessed behind the scenes so no one would necessarily know. But it was still a huge problem full of temptations. The American firms would usually be at a disadvantage compared to their European competitors who didn't face the same anti-corruption constraints.

Q: And also, because you are working with a Greek partner, who is a deeply embedded life-after-you-leave local partner.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. They wanted to build a new airport, and American companies were interested in the project. American firms did projects like this well. But it was very difficult to land the contracts because of the bureaucratic sluggishness and hands out under the table.

Greek Intellectual Property Pirates

Intellectual property [IPR] was another very big issue. The economy was greatly carried by small Greek businessmen, and those guys were out there hustling with intellectual property only an afterthought, if they even knew what it was.

Q: Help me on that because when I hear IPR [intellectual property rights], I think major corporations with proprietary know-how technology, systems, products. How does that apply in the small business context?

CLEVERLEY: Well, take copyright, as an example.

Q: Okay, so, it is actually publishing and books.

CLEVERLEY: And movies.

Q: Aha, entertainment.

CLEVERLEY: Entertainment. The Motion Picture Association of America zeroed in because the level of piracy in Greece was massive. I don't know if you remember Jack Valenti.

Q: Oh, yes.

CLEVERLEY: Jack Valenti was president of the Motion Picture Association of America. You used to see him on the Oscars program. He had also been a chief aide to Lyndon Johnson and was widely known for his picture standing on Air Force One as Johnson was being sworn in with Jackie Kennedy standing next to him. Anyway, Jack Valenti zeroed in on Greece and decided to make a visit to Athens. I was in charge of his program, and we wanted to put the full weight of the embassy behind his program. We organized a meeting with the minister who oversaw IPR. Part of it was education. Jack Valenti understood well how the Greeks could say they didn't have a problem when in fact there was a big problem.

Q: And by that time, videotapes, was that the technology of the day for pirating?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, it was, and also music CDs. Valenti's first concern, of course, was movies and video cassettes, but the American music industry was also in his mind.

Q: Yeah, as the movie producers.

CLEVERLEY: We took Valenti to the meeting with the minister and a group of Greek officials. Right in the very beginning, he opened his briefcase and pulled out a number of cassettes. "I just bought these this morning here in Athens, and they are all pirated," he opened. His action started the meeting off on a different footing for the Greeks. It sent a message: this was a serious problem, and if they were going to get along with the United States, they had to put intellectual property close to the top of the list.

We eventually ended up getting a Greek commitment to revise its legislation and to educate the police on IPR matters. They also agreed to put seals on cassette cases. The new law had teeth with serious penalties and fines. IPR became less an issue over my tour. Valenti came twice over that period. He was an effective, short, dynamic person you will never forget. He did something I never saw happen again. In a busy noontime intersection in Kolonaki, think a Greek Times Square, he pulled off his shirt and replaced it with a clean one while pedestrians looked into the embassy car as they crossed the street.

For me, Athens was a very busy posting because we had so few resources in the section with a heavy, complex agenda. The things I have talked about are just the bilateral issues, but then we had the multilateral agenda that included United States relations with the European Union. It was also the period of the Maastricht initiatives and all the things going on in Brussels.

Q: But Maastricht doesn't come along—no, no, you are absolutely correct. We are into the '90s, sorry. So, your multilateral issues were U.S.-EU? Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. I'm trying to set up for a nice list there so that you can define it.

CLEVERLEY: The multilateral issues mainly had to do with trade policy, things going on in Geneva, things going on in Brussels, integration in the European Union, the move toward monetary union. And there were the issues of East-West trade following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Geographically and historically, Greece was a gateway into Southeastern Europe and tried to play a critical role in the troubled post-Cold War Balkans.

Q: Were you still under GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] or had the WTO [World Trade Organization] emerged? And did that make a difference?

CLEVERLEY: WTO negotiations were in their final stages and were completed in 1994 with the Marrakesh agreement. Much of the nitty-gritty in the US-EU discussions was hammered out in Brussels and Geneva, but there was always a dialogue and flow of demarches seeking to influence member state positions.

Greece in the EU

Q: Yeah. Did they qualify early on for membership in the EU or were they recently drawn to the Union? And sort of members from the Maastricht period on?

CLEVERLEY: No, they were members earlier, joining in 1981. The thing was, for some members of the European Union, the EU was more than an economic arrangement. It had as much a unilateral aspect to it as a communal arrangement. Greece was one of these countries, and Finland was another. In Greece's case, there were two thoughts the Greeks had in mind when they joined the European Union.

The first centered on the difficulty of modernizing their economy and managing their society. If you go to any country with a sizable Greek diaspora – the United States, Australia, or even South Africa—you'll find that the ethnic Greeks are some of the most successful in terms of education and wealth. In the United States Greeks are only after our Jewish community. There's nothing inherent in the Greek personality that prevents them from being as effective, efficient, and successful in Greece. It is probably because of Greece's institutional weaknesses—corruption, patronship, and a history of poor governance—that the country struggles in so many ways. Many saw the European Union membership as a mechanism for modernization. The European Union could provide them a front to hide behind politically in passing legislation that would otherwise be unpopular,

to avoid political liability when making the economy more responsive to market influences. Any Greek government could say that the unpopular measures were mandated in Brussels. In other words, EU membership could be a way of promoting needed domestic policies.

That was one thing. And the other thing they wanted from the EU was greater security. Greece's border with Turkey was a very sensitive one, and more than once in recent times, the two countries had been on the verge of conflict. They saw the European Union as a means of pacifying the relationship with Turkey. While Greece was outside of the European Union, Turkey could be aggressive with Greece with no one there to support the Greeks. Would NATO even be there? Turkey was also a NATO member. However, if Greece's frontier was the European Union's frontier, they believed they would have the European Union behind them. And so they were a strong advocate of joining the European Union.

Q: And was the concept or that position policy broadly popular in Greece? Or did it produce intense fraction, division?

CLEVERLEY: I think it was broadly popular among the political elites, except for the far left and far right. The wider mainstream realized that there were a lot of advantages for them to have European legislation implemented in Greece. There were exceptions of course—everyone has joked about nonsensical EU directives. However, the Greeks were always on board with all the Maastricht arrangements. They were immediately on board with the European Monetary Union. And they still are. I think they see the European Union as a process which benefits them in their own distinctive environment.

Q: Yeah. We are coming to the end of our time today so we'll use this as a good departure point on Friday for further thoughts you have on the EU dimension factor. And that is only the first in your list of multilateral concerns to add to the bilateral ones. This is very rich and we don't want to give it short shrift. So, gather your thoughts, anything you want to go back to is fine on Friday, but we'll start with sort of summing up the EU dimension. And then, the border with Turkey you mentioned as multilateral, the trade. You mentioned EU and trade and I suspect there were other issues as well. Global issues like narcotics and trafficking and all sorts of things, I suspect lie under that. So, you might make up your list and we will address those in the next session.

CLEVERLEY: That sounds good. Okay, I'll see you. Hope you have a nice weekend.

Q: Okay, thank you.

Q: This is Stephanie Kinney on March 18, Friday, March 18, 2022, conducting oral history session number nine, with Mike Cleverley. Mike, before we go forward on South Africa, are there any additional points or wrap ups, thoughts, you want to include regarding your first tour in Greece?

A Family in Greece

CLEVERLEY: Maybe just some very short comments in order to create continuity. In discussing earlier postings, we talked about the family, how it was structured, and how family members related to the assignment. Our Greek assignment came during big changes in our family. Our twin daughters, Kristiina and Kaarina, had graduated from West Springfield High in Springfield, Virginia, just before our departure from Washington. After we had been in Athens for about six weeks, they boarded the plane and flew away to college. Seija and I saw them off, and then drove our car to the top of Lycabettus, a tall hill in central Athens, and just watched as the plane flew overhead. It was one of those moments in life like taking your children to kindergarten for the first time. They were excited, but we were down.

We still had two sons at home. Our oldest son, Mika, was a senior at the American Community School of Athens. And our youngest son, Markus, was going into the eighth grade. Mika, of course, left home, too, a year later. During most of our four-year tour in Athens, we had just one child at home, instead of the four children at home as we had previously.

Although Athens could be a tough post for the employee, and many Americans did not enjoy it there, for the employee's family it could be something else. The terrorist threat was not directed toward the family, and property theft or other personal threats were not rampant like in Italy, or even England for that matter. We wanted our children home for the summers when they could enjoy Greece at its best, but our children were looking for jobs to help pay university expenses. The Embassy was penny-poor amidst the Department's tight budget restrictions, but management was sensitive to the need to find embassy summer jobs for returning young people. At first it didn't seem possible, but the embassy dug deep into its pockets, and we appreciated its efforts. As it turned out, the summer jobs offered our teenagers some of their best experiences. They worked in real sections, like finance, and made many friends there. Our daughter, Kristiina, worked as a lifeguard at a hotel affiliated with the Air Force base. There were chances to travel on weekends to many of the country's exotic locations in the mountains and islands, even yacht excursions with other young people from the embassy and base.

Seija, at first, was repelled by Greece's chaos and disorder, but within a few months she loved the country. She bought a windsurf board to share with the children on hot Athens afternoons and weekends. And she kept busy supporting me. Athens, then, had a sophisticated evening culture. In at least our working world, people went to the homes of friends for late dinners that often started at 9:00 pm or later. I was able to develop a vast number of close contacts only after inviting them to a dinner party at our home. Some of these friends later became prominent: a prime minister, a minister of finance, the head of the Bank of Greece, etc. It was interesting coming back on our second tour ten years later. All these friendships picked up from where we left off, and even today we have more foreign service friends in Greece than all other postings together. We didn't have a staff, so Seija joined me in a busy social schedule, one that kept us up until 1:00 or 2:00 on many evenings over the week, and she organized and cooked for a full representational

program in our residence. Coming home late or entertaining late and then going to the office early the next morning were taxing. Often, we slept the entire morning when Saturday came around.

South Africa 1993-1996

Q: And so, the next time your twin daughters would come visit you, and Foreign Service children do get I think, one visit a year when they're in college, they would find themselves in a very different world. A black world, a nation in birthing, a period of dramatic and rapid change—not a small amount of turmoil. You and your family had in the meantime settled into the next assignment as economic counselor in Pretoria. First, what was it like, your arrival—and as a white family from the United States with a European context and immediate service—what was it like personally, if anything special at all, settling into South Africa? And we want to focus especially now on the particulars of your service as economic counselor in the embassy in Pretoria.

CLEVERLEY: Well, South Africa was a huge change. South Africa was front and center in the news at that time. We were reading about it before we ever got there. It was our first trip to Africa. Someone told us as we were getting ready to go to Africa that Africa had something that got into your blood. Once you went there, you always wanted to return. We learned what that meant.

Q: What did it mean? What did you discover that it meant for you?

Our South African Township and Neighborhood

CLEVERLEY: I'll get there, but let me take a step back, first. When we arrived, an officer in my section picked us up and took us to our new residence. It was a nice home in central Pretoria. A maid and a gardener lived in a small house in the back, as well as another person who worked for the embassy as a national employee. I don't know how it happened, but over the years someone had offered him a place to stay there.

Q: He lived in.

CLEVERLEY: He lived in, which for us was perfectly fine. We felt like we had inherited our own township—not like Soweto, but a small community. Jamison, the gardener, was from Malawi, and his wife was a Black South African. She had a job a few blocks away, and they had two little boys. We were shocked when we heard that with all the constraints they faced, it had never been possible for them to live together. This was one of many appalling things we were to see. Rosina, a woman from the Zulu tribe, was our domestic help. And then there was Paul, who worked for the embassy and was a true gentleman in the best sense. We immediately felt we had a dialogue with insight into the less advantaged parts of this dualistic country, something that was very human, natural and down to earth, and we valued it a lot.

Not long after we arrived, Rosina, our domestic started having her boyfriend over for weekends. That didn't go over well with us because we didn't know who or what he was. South Africa was hardly the low crime, defined risk place that Athens had been. Finally, Seija told her that she was not allowed to bring anyone on the property at night. Rosina told our gardener she planned to kill my wife. I talked to the RSO (Regional Security Officer), and it was decided she had to go, the same afternoon.

But now we needed a domestic, and Seija offered the job to Jamison's wife, Lettie. She moved in together with their two boys, and for the first time in their married life they lived together as a family.

Q: Oh, wow.

CLEVERLEY: Jamison was worried that his wife didn't know how to do this type of domestic work or cook for us. Seija promised to train and teach her. She would learn skills, develop experience, and have a recommendation for any job in the future. We were glad to have a family living next to us. We learned to understand how ordinary people related to what was going on in the country and what hardships they faced.

Our neighborhood was all White. Next door to us was an Afrikaner doctor, Hermann, and his wife, Nellie. They were older, and their kids were adults. We got to know them, as well. It was hard to get to know white South Africans because they had a lot of conflicting feelings towards Americans who, many thought, betrayed them with sanctions. But Hermann and Nellie were generous to us and made us feel very comfortable. We had our own township, and we had our neighbors.

It was interesting. Hermann and Nellie didn't consider themselves at all prejudiced. They even paid college expenses for their Black maid's son. When the son was, at some point later, killed they helped the domestic deal with the tragedy in many different ways. So, they considered themselves enlightened, and by South African standards, they were enlightened.

Q: It sounds like the moderate whites I knew growing up in the segregated south.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, yeah, well, exactly. I think it is their version of that. But they also dominated their own black staff, we learned. We had a four-way dialogue going on. We could talk to the neighbors next door, and we could talk to our own township. But our township and theirs had their own conversations, which we sometimes heard about through our own. And so, we got to know all of the intricacies of this little community and its problems.

For example, when South Africa organized its first free election, about a year after we arrived, the Black community had never voted before. It was all new. There were voter education programs so that they could understand how this worked, how they would vote, and where. We were excited and Seija asked Jamison and Lettie how they were going to vote. "For Mandela," they exclaimed. Then, they added in a quiet voice, neighbors

Hermann and Nellie had told their domestics that they had to vote for de Klerk [F.W. de Klerk], the National Party candidate, not Mandela. Then Jamison laughed with a smile, “Don't tell anyone, but they will anyway vote for Mandela.”

Q: It sounds like, in a microcosm, you had an opportunity to understand the multiple dimensions and realities and perspectives of the macro environment in which you were going to be working and representing the United States and the United States Embassy.

CLEVERLEY: That's right.

Q: Do you have any observations about how, what you have just described, related to, influenced, enabled your work as a diplomat?

CLEVERLEY: Well, certainly, I believe it was something I call microhistory. You know, in economics, you talk about macroeconomics and microeconomics.

Q: That's why I'm using the metaphor.

CLEVERLEY: So, microhistory deals with the people—how they lived and faired. I wrote a book that looked at ordinary families and how they dealt with the big moments in history: how people saw them, how they influenced them, and how they were affected by them. On this level, you see a slightly different picture than when you're just describing the grand image of everything. How would anyone understand the last four years under the Trump administration, if they didn't understand what was happening on the family and friends level, the polarization, the interaction, and the bad feelings from both directions.

Q: The sum of the micro adds up to the macro. But if you only use the generalizations of the macro, the language is inadequate.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I think the feelings are inadequate. The understanding is inadequate. You do see the macro, but you don't always get the implications and emotions.

Q: Yeah, yeah. The human reality.

CLEVERLEY: The suffering and the joys, and the triumphs and the losses. That's what our “township” and “neighborhood” taught me as a diplomat serving there. South Africa's plight during the transition to democracy became three-dimensional. We understood and felt what was happening.

Q: Can you elaborate a little bit more, because what you've just described is common to every single diplomat in every single diplomatic service. In fact, any national diplomatic corps, that being the collection of all the different diplomats accredited to the country—as opposed to the Service, which is national—do you have any observations or

thoughts on how, what you have just described, matters in the diplomatic order of things? Or the system or the work?

CLEVERLEY: So, if the idea of diplomacy is that you are Washington's people on the ground and you are the conduit of information—

Q: You are Washington's agent.

CLEVERLEY: Washington's agent and the conduit goes both directions. So, Washington's messages, the United States' messages to that country come usually through the embassy in one form or another. But if Washington needs to, or the State Department or the White House, or whoever Washington is—if they have to make judgments or decisions based on information available, then your job is to make sure they have good information sent back through this conduit. If you're trying to give them a recommendation, judgment, or observation, you have to understand that the closer diplomats are to the ground, the better they might be able to perform this role. And that's why I—

Q: And we call that reporting.

CLEVERLEY: Well, it used to be called reporting. I don't think the reporting is done as well today, because there's not the same time for it as in the past. Nevertheless, there is some form of reporting, of course, but in terms of thought pieces, the impression I have received since I left the State Department, and what I hear when talking to my FSO son, is that thought pieces are just not as available as they used to be. You don't have the time to do it, and maybe even read it on the other side. There are so many different types of other things and objectives required, such as advocacy.

Q: I want you to hold on to that thought because at the very end of your history, I think you've identified something very important to further elaborate on.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, okay. Well, let's come back to it because I have long thought about it.

Q: So, what did you actually do when you went to the office and you performed as the economic counselor? And what did that mean? What were the issues that you focused on and how did you work? What kinds of accomplishments, where did you succeed, where did you fail? Why did you succeed, why did you fail? Or whatever is left in between. But give us now, as long as you want, a picture of that.

Clouds and Challenges in the South African Transition

CLEVERLEY: Okay, let me just transition this way. The white-black, black-white violence that characterized the years before the 1994 election had dissipated somewhat, or at least the political violence was mutating to criminal violence at the time of our arrival. But there were plenty of victims to go around. That, and a prevailing concern

over whether the election would break down into violence and even civil war, contributed to a very heavy atmosphere inside the embassy and out. It translated into an overwhelming feeling that our embassy needed to do everything possible to make the transition a success.

When I think back about my position in the embassy then, I believe it was one of the two most difficult assignments that I had in the Foreign Service. There were several reasons for this. One had to do with the personal tragedies we were seeing. Everywhere around us we met people who had suffered greatly. You got to know many people who were victimized. Of course, this was something that could happen in many postings, but it was something you carried with you.

One of the biggest challenges facing me when I arrived was the rapid transition in the thrust of American policy toward South Africa. The level of U.S. interest in South Africa had intensified immensely when Clinton was elected president the year before. One of his biggest constituencies was the African American community. African Americans were following what was happening in South Africa very closely, because it had relevance to their own experience. Clinton was interested in a successful transition in South Africa, and as the transition began to approach, Washington's focus on South Africa magnified quickly.

A successful transition had to be political and economic. Over the years, the political section had been structured properly for meeting the reporting, advocacy, and other requirements. The economic section, however, had been neglected to a great extent because there wasn't much bilateral economic activity. In the world of sanctions, there were not supposed to be many economic/commercial things going on. There really wasn't a lot of need for many of the things economic sections usually do. But as the election drew nearer, American policy began to shift from the political to the economic. The newly politically empowered needed to succeed, and that meant that in South Africa's dualistic society they badly needed to be economically empowered.

When I arrived, I had a deputy, three officers, a temporary mid-level officer, and an office manager. I realized that this was inadequate for the types of things we were assigned to cover and do. Despite Washington's great interest in South Africa, getting additional resources from the budget-poor State Department was extremely challenging. I started almost immediately trying to increase the number of officers. I also wanted to make their jobs slightly different from what they were before. It took time, sweat, pain, and a stream of carefully crafted cables, but we finally were able to re-structure with an 02 deputy, two 03 officers, an 02 ES&T officer, and two office management assistants. I also got the embassy to agree to transfer a third 02 energy and minerals officer from the Consulate General in Johannesburg to my section. He continued to live with his family in Johannesburg and commuted to Pretoria each day.

Q: Was that dangerous? How long did it take?

CLEVERLEY: The main road between Pretoria and Johannesburg was freeway, and traffic normally moved quickly. So it wasn't so dangerous. The bigger, more dangerous areas were usually secluded areas in the metropolitan areas.

Q: How long was the commute?

CLEVERLEY: Maybe 30-40 minutes.

I also got a very bright Presidential Management Intern who, although inexperienced in Embassy work, was very capable. We also hired our first national employee, a young Black South African economist who had just finished graduate school. My preference was always to hire relatively young national employees. I saw how they entered with a lot of enthusiasm and energy. With older hires at some point, there could be some lethargy, or, more often, they might just be waiting for you to get your new assignment. They were not always so responsible and often harbored their own ideas of how the embassy should be functioning when they knew Americans come and go. So, we ended up with a better, more powerful section.

The downside of getting a young, dynamic person into a senior slot was that they might not stay very long because with American Embassy experience, they could go out and get another job easily. But that was also okay, because if they stayed with me only a few years, we gained much from their energy and vitality. That's exactly what we got with this young man. It was a little bit of a challenge because, you know, people in the South African business community weren't experienced in dealing with young Black professionals from the American Embassy. But on the other hand, Black business in South Africa was expanding very quickly. It was a good choice, and that's exactly what I foresaw when I hired him.

The Gore-Mbeki Commission

It was not long until re-organizing the embassy's economic resources paid off. One of the early things that the Clinton-Gore administration did as far as South Africa was concerned, was to propose a binational commission at the cabinet level. One of the biggest thrusts of American policy at this point was to empower the emergent political and economic elite in South Africa. There were simple things, and some expensive ones, we could do to help.

The binational commission was chaired on the United States side by Vice President Gore and on the South African side by Vice President Thabo Mbeki. The Gore-Mbeki Commission, as we called it, spread the U.S. interface with South Africa quite broadly, particularly in the economic, business, energy, health and science fields. Our section covered all these and thus became the lead section in the embassy for Gore-Mbeki. The commission was divided into councils headed by cabinet officials, the secretary of commerce, secretary of energy, USAID administrator, and so on, on our side. The process produced networking among our senior officials, and we mapped out various kinds of

joint projects that would be put together and consummated in the subsequent years. It was fully operational by 1995.

America's Assistance Program for the New South Africa

The United States realized that there wasn't enough money in the United States or South Africa to fully remodel the South African public infrastructure and economy that had stagnated after years of international isolation, and the deadening effects of apartheid. The USAID component of our action was its largest Sub-Saharan Africa program and aimed specifically at building human capital and infrastructure. But even that large a program was insufficient compared to the needs. So, what we wanted to do was leverage. Leverage meant things like opening markets, promoting trade, and making available export and investment financing. The dollars we put in hopefully would spawn additional funds. The charge had to be led by the private sector.

Q: Yeah. What did leverage mean operationally?

CLEVERLEY: For example, OPIC [Overseas Private Investment Corporation], today called the International Development Finance Corporation, could provide a fund for investment in South Africa or insure an investor, reducing the risks for American investors. OPIC's programs would ideally generate a much larger flow of American investment capital into the country. Similarly, Export-Import Bank credits could open up trade opportunities. USAID could stimulate small business opportunities with guarantees to reduce risks of opening a business in South Africa. Banks would feel more confident in making financing available. There was a list of opportunities that would benefit from American guarantees. There was tremendous need for American investment, because a lot of the big foreign investors in South Africa had been forced to disinvest.

Q: Because of the boycott?

CLEVERLEY: Because of the federal and other sanctions. I'll talk about that more in a second. You had a group of former American investors in South Africa—the IBMs, and so forth—who might come back to South Africa. But you also had a lot of small Black American and other American companies who were not as experienced in foreign trade or investment. They might set up trade or operations in an environment like South Africa if you could help lower the risks. And newly empowered South Africa businesses might begin to flourish if you could offer incentives or reduce risks.

The Commission planned to meet once every six months, in either Washington or South Africa. The first meeting was in Pretoria, and the delegation was led by Vice President Gore. Also attending were the secretary of commerce, the secretary of energy, and other cabinet level people plus staffs. It was huge, you can imagine what the delegation was like: a serious logistical operation, to say nothing of the substantive components that had to be worked. But we managed it very well. We had good organization. I think I organized about thirty control officers.

Q: Did the visitors, The Ron Browns, the Vice President Gores, did they come with spouses or by themselves? Because very often, they come with spouses who also have to be taken care of.

CLEVERLEY: Usually, they came alone. People were nervous about the violence, and having spouses wandering around Johannesburg or Pretoria without close supervision would have been unthinkable. As an embassy, we really didn't have a lot of resources for putting together a spouse program.

The visits often produced unexpected color. As part of our health cooperation, a couple of doctors came from HHS (Department of Health and Human Services), to meet with counterparts. They were interested in natural and traditional medicines. The Black South African community had a long tradition in these areas, and we arranged an appointment for them in the lobby of the Holiday Inn, a fairly posh hotel in central Pretoria. Two doctors, call them witch doctors if you wish, arrived almost on time, dressed in leopard skins, feathers, and hardly anything else. Even though I had set up the meeting, I didn't expect the spectacle. They talked about how they worked with community health. It sounds kind of funny now, but it was really a very important connection to make.

Q: No, absolutely. So, you had DOC (Department of Commerce), you had HHS??

CLEVERLEY: Yes, OPIC, EXIM Bank, Energy, USAID on both sides of the Atlantic, and more agencies. It was a machine with a lot of humming on many different levels.

Building Ties, Dismantling Sanctions

Q: Be careful what you ask for.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. Anyway, launching the commission was a huge organizational challenge. Another undertaking we prioritized was connecting the two sides of this split country in ways that produced constructive dialogue. One night, for example, we hosted a reception in our residence for South African miners and mineworkers. Mining is a huge industry in South Africa. I invited some managers of the mines and some senior miners' union officials. It was a Black-meets-White occasion, as you can imagine. The union people were non-Whites. The mining companies were White. They met each other over cocktails. The head of the miners' union told me before they left that he had never met these people on a social level. And he was the president of the union. These types of "greet and meet" type occasions were repeated over and over in embassy functions and homes. We hoped that doing things like this would create dialogue and break the ice, or at least introduce the idea that in the new South Africa, you need to be talking to all of the players, not just some of them.

Another complex task was dismantling the American sanctions regimes. In addition to the United States government sanctions, many states, cities, and even universities had over the years adopted hundreds of sanctions regimes against South Africa. Apart from the federal level, many of these entities did not know it was time to encourage economic

and commercial development rather than penalize it. Much of the groundwork had to be done in the United States because somebody had to be contacting these American organizations. Convincing them that things had changed, however, was not always easy, and it seemed to us that one of the best ways, when possible, was to let them see with their own eyes the changes that had already taken place. There was a man, an African American pastor named Leon Sullivan, who was extremely influential in the anti-apartheid movement. Sullivan was very much focused on sanctions. In fact, he and his followers were greatly behind the implementation of sanctions on all levels, including the federal.

Leon Sullivan had come to South Africa years before, during the days of apartheid, and customs or immigration had strip-searched him. He said he was determined to never again set foot in the country. It seemed imperative, however, to get Leon Sullivan back to South Africa. He had drafted and promoted a set of principles called the Sullivan Principles, that had been enabled in US legislations. The Sullivan Principles mandated that U.S. companies with investments in South Africa would have to manage their anti-discriminatory operations in the same way they did in the United States. In other words, racial policies not allowed in the United States in hiring, promotions, etc. would not be allowed in South Africa, either. It was difficult for most U.S. companies to comply. If they couldn't comply with the Sullivan Principles, they were required to disinvest, which many did.

Q: And now you needed them to come back.

CLEVERLEY: We needed the companies to come back. Incidentally, a lot of this disinvestment had been totally counterproductive. IBM, for example, divested its large operation through a sell-out to management. Of course, management was all White. After IBM left, the company still existed under new ownership and a new name. But its personnel policies were much less sympathetic to racial equality than what IBM had been doing.

Sullivan's support for rehabilitating South Africa was crucial. He told me he could write a message on his church's bulletin board and a hundred churches would have read it by next day. His organization was influential throughout the evangelical movement in the United States.

Q: And this was before the internet and social media.

CLEVERLEY: Well, the internet was there but still limited in scope.

Q: I mean, yeah, and certainly not social media. And the internet was in its early days.

CLEVERLEY: Very early days. He also told me something interesting. He said, "I'm the type of guy that if I were driving in the backseat of a taxicab and I saw a demonstration coming down the street, I would jump out of the cab and join them without even knowing what the demonstration was about." He was an activist, with a capital A. He was also fun,

intelligent, and charismatic. He had a tremendous visit to South Africa when we finally got him there.

I was on the board of the South Africa-U.S. Chamber of Commerce, an organization where the firms that had stayed in South Africa participated: Johnson & Johnson, Reader's Digest, and so on. These firms had tried to compensate for their presence through various types of social responsibility programs. For example, Johnson & Johnson had constructed a burn clinic in Soweto, where so many people suffered serious injuries from burns. They didn't have electricity or gas heating, but were using oils and kerosene and when you have kerosene in your house—

Q: Yeah, high risk.

CLEVERLEY: All the other American companies had various types of social responsibility programs, as well. It was good for Leon Sullivan to hear this from the chamber. He hadn't paid a lot of attention to what they were doing. I can't remember the amount, but I think he found that these companies had poured something like a billion dollars' worth of support into disadvantaged communities and people over the years of the sanctions. He was converted completely, and when he went back to the States, he helped unravel the sanctions regimes.

Q: What year was that, more or less?

CLEVERLEY: That was probably about 1994, 1995, I suppose.

Q: Yeah, because your tour in South Africa was from '93 to '96, is that correct?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that's correct.

Q: Yeah, we didn't say that up front and we want to frame it chronologically.

Complexity of Post Management in Pretoria

CLEVERLEY: On the management side, I had some serious personnel problems in my section, and I didn't feel that I got a lot of support from the front office.

Q: What does serious personnel problems mean?

CLEVERLEY: My first deputy suffered from alcoholism. He was a brilliant and extremely capable person, but he was also capable of insulting the Ambassador at a reception at the embassy residence. There were other instances when his alcoholism affected his performance.

Q: Yikes.

CLEVERLEY: The ambassador, after that reception, asked me if I would see that he was sent back to Washington. It was extremely difficult, because the section head is not the right person to determine who's going to leave post. The ambassador and the DCM work problems like that. The DCM seemed disinterested, but I finally managed to get the employee med-evac'ed after working extensively with the management counselor and medical officers. There are various types of protections built into our HR system to protect people from arbitrary actions, and the process of dealing with a problem like this was time consuming and sensitive.

This officer was replaced by someone who came to the office every day at twelve or one o'clock. She explained it was difficult to get up in the morning. I asked if she could get a note from one of the embassy doctors saying a medical issue caused the problem. She was never able to provide one. With the heavy volume of requirements falling on our section, not having the deputy available during all working hours was a struggle. It was difficult working the issue with the DCM, who didn't seem to want to deal with this one, either. She told me it was a problem I had to deal with. The officer was very capable, except when she was absent for half of the workday. She worked later into the evening, but a lot of our work needed to be done during the day, advocacy and interaction with the ministries. These two situations continued for the entire time I was there.

Q: Was she a Foreign Service Officer?

CLEVERLEY: Yes.

Q: Why was she still worldwide available for the needs of the foreign service, when she, in fact, couldn't comply with the needs of the service or the requirements of the job?

CLEVERLEY: That's a very good question. It seemed to me then and since that there were serious deficiencies in the medical clearance process. I really didn't want to destroy her career. She was a capable officer, and a likable person. She wasn't lazy. My suspicion was that she really did have some type of a medical problem that she or someone in the Medical Division should have been addressing.

Q: Yeah, and she couldn't do the job.

CLEVERLEY: She couldn't do the job as it needed to be done. So, that meant that a lot of the issues I would normally delegate to someone at that level in the section had to go to somebody else. Sometimes they were happy to get a little more challenge. Sometimes, not. Everyone in our section had their hands full of their own things.

Q: If you'll forgive me for interrupting but I think, I was expecting that you were going to talk about what you did. To some degree, the Binational Commission was huge but there were other things. In other words, the substantive side of the house, what I'm hearing was overcome by the managerial challenges and realities of the job. I'm struck by how the old Foreign Service segregated "policy" and management, and you were one or the other. What I'm hearing from you is, the reality is, as you go up the pole, if you do the work and

the job, and meet all of the requirements and demands; you were spending an enormous amount of your time, and in fact required your greatest hardest skill set, was management. Not policy, not reporting, not understanding the culture, but rather, getting your people and your section functioning fully, effectively, in a dramatically demanding moment of history. Could you reflect on that?

Embassy Pretoria Morale

CLEVERLEY: Yes. It was not one or the other. In that embassy during those days, the substantive work had to be done. The management problems put unnecessary strain on us as we did it. There was no option of not getting things done. In a word, the failure of post management—the DCM and ambassador—to fill their management responsibilities left an unnecessary burden for us to carry.

This assignment was very operational because of the transition the country and post were going through. So, doing a lot of reporting was not as important as making sure the operational requirements were met on time. If you have a visit by the secretary of commerce next week or the secretary of energy the week after that, you had to make sure everything was ready to go when they touched down. Even things such as trying to open a dialogue between the two sides of the transition in my home, were as much operational as policy related. So, it was the type of thing that I learned later, in my DCM positions, that if you were going to be successful as a DCM, you had to spend a tremendous amount of your time on management types of issues.

In this section, it was the management issues that complicated the operational process. Of course, we did some important substantive reporting. We did an assessment of American sanctions. How did they affect South Africa during their heyday? We did scene setters for senior level visits all the time. But it was different from my assignment in London where we had, let's say, the luxury of sitting back and thinking through, "What is going on in this country and what does this mean for the United States."

Q: London was more dependent upon observation, thought and analysis, and this was more dependent on operations and tactical management and logistics execution. Is that fair?

CLEVERLEY: Well, London gave you the time to do the observations. Pretoria didn't. There just wasn't a lot of time. Operational and management requirements precluded that.

Q: Could you manage without substantive expertise and command and mastery? Or vice versa? Could you do policy without—

CLEVERLEY: Not really.

Q: —the managerial skills to make it mean something other than theory or words?

CLEVERLEY: Just being physically present and on top of things often dominated my busy, heavy workload. Operational in this case, often meant being physically present in something that was happening. So much of my work took place in Johannesburg, the country's business capital, about 40 miles from Pretoria. I sometimes made three trips to Johannesburg a day, back and forth for different meetings. If Mandela was meeting American businessmen, we needed to have a seat in the hall. If Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown was bringing a contingent of people, FCS (Foreign Commercial Service) could take care of a lot of it, but not all. We had to be in his meetings with the South Africa American Chamber of Commerce so you knew what was said. If you had a seat in the hall, it couldn't be an empty one. Getting more to the point you raised, you couldn't be effectively operational if you were not on the forefront of the substance. The homework, you did on your own. I got a pile of books on South Africa before I arrived, and I got another after. I did that on my own.

Q: When did you have time to read?

CLEVERLEY: At night or sitting in the car traveling back and forth to Johannesburg. I was also fortunate to have good mentors both in my section and the political section. So, when I was new and reading into my job, some of my younger officers were very helpful in bringing me up to speed. Before they became ministers in the Mandela government, I had met many of the country's future leaders. It helped as they assumed power.

While in Pretoria I was presented two Superior Honor Awards, a group award and an individual award for my accomplishments there. I was glad that the post recognized my work. It compensated for the lack of promotions coming out of Washington. At the time, the Department was trying to downsize the foreign service, among other ways, by letting the OC grade officers' Time in Class requirement run out. OCs, such as I was, had seven years to get a promotion or face retirement. Earlier in the Foreign Service, just about everyone at that level met the seven-year requirement. But during my years in Pretoria, many good officers were separated from the service for not passing through this window. Promotion lists were very short. I recall only one officer at any grade in the political and economic sections getting promoted in Pretoria, and there were some excellent officers working very hard then. I was not yet at the seven-year point, but it was closing in on me, and I was uncertain of my career future.

Q: Yeah, there was a stealth riff of the Foreign Service in the mid- '90s. And basically, they decapitated 01 political officers.

CLEVERLEY: 01 and OCs.

Q: And OCs, yeah. Or people who had opened their window and I don't think the Service ever really recovered. It was because there was a senior surplus.

CLEVERLEY: I wonder if the thought that there was an overall surplus of officers reflected the era's senior State Department mentality that diplomacy was less needed post-Cold War.

Q: Yeah. Forgive me but we did your dates for Pretoria but what was your rank when you arrived and what was your rank when you left?

CLEVERLEY: I was an OC when I arrived and an OC when I left.

Q: And that meant you had passed the threshold in the Senior Foreign Service.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I was in the Senior Foreign Service, and that was good. But I had gone through the O1 rank fairly quickly.

Q: And the effect of this period was that the people who had been rapidly promoted were the very people who were eliminated by this period of time, in the execution of the O1s and the OCs.

CLEVERLEY: They were very much at risk. It was not a very good system, your career hanging over your head with little reference to how many hours you worked, or how well you achieved, you know. You felt like you were working yourself to death, night and day with little recognition or reward from Washington. But the post did what it could, and that was valuable.

Q: At least a little bit of psychic income.

CLEVERLEY: Psychic income but the situation still had a multiplier effect on morale with all the other things that were going on. Pretoria wasn't the happiest time I had in the Foreign Service, but it was one of the most exciting. I think you can have a very exciting time without being the happiest person.

Q: It is called living in history.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, perhaps. We were living in history. When the late April 1994 election approached, things in South Africa were scary and downright heavy. As we got into January and February, it was still not clear what was going to happen, whether it would succeed or the whole process would break down. In the worst case, it could generate a civil war. There was so much uncertainty about whether an agreement between the two sides could be reached.

A Violent Turning Point for the Election

One lingering question was whether all opposition parties would join. These parties were not homogenous. The two big ones, the ANC [African National Congress] and the IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party] clashed violently over the months before the election. Another question was whether the South African military would play a stabilizing role in the immediate aftermath. And so, as tensions in society built and Black-on-Black violence intensified, you turned your radio on in the morning news to hear of another massacre between the two opposition groupings.

In the early spring 1994, only weeks before the scheduled election, Lucas Mangope, the Black African president of a “homeland” named Bophuthatswana, turned to the White Right to bolster his position. Bophuthatswana was a puppet of apartheid South Africa, and when the transition to democracy neared, Mangope hoped to resist the coming changes. AWB [Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging] leadership welcomed Mangope’s invitation and drove throughout the homeland shooting and murdering people along the road. At one point, the Bophuthatswana police had had enough and turned their weapons on one of the AWB cars.

Q: Was this person—was it white on black or black on white or black on black? I’m sorry.

CLEVERLEY: The AWB were neo-Nazi White supremacists with beards and big beer bellies. Their lead car was strafed and three of the guys were wounded. They got out and were executed live on TV.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: Nearly everyone in South Africa was shocked by this brazen display of the worst they feared, on TV before their eyes. It was as if a bomb had exploded at that point. One of the results was that the AWB was totally demoralized having been neutered in such a graphic way in front of the whole population. That was, ironically, the time when everything began to move towards the election. It was that single moment that made the May election possible.

Q: Elaborate a little bit more on how and why it was this tragic, violent incident—but there have been lots of tragic violent incidents—what was it about this one that impacted both the black and white factors that would essentially determine whether or not there was a successful election?

CLEVERLEY: I think sometimes in history, there are enough-is-enough moments. Relating that to the moment where we are right now, I think Putin's invasion of Ukraine was enough for most of the Europeans. They weren't going to put up with more aggression in central Europe and were able to find that unity they hadn't been able to discover before.

Q: And this incident had the same galvanizing effect. Was it fear that drove everybody to say, “Okay, there are going to be elections.” Was it resignation? Was it a little bit of both? What was the—I hear what you were saying but what was the underlying driver once this occurred?

CLEVERLEY: I believe that a lot of people at that moment concluded that the AWB, and with it, the extreme White Right, had lost credibility. And no longer were they excused. I think it kind of drove a resolution that enough is enough, and now we've got to make this work. It displayed so graphically to the entire population at once what could happen if it didn't work. That resonated through the Black community as well as the White. The

opposition community, IFP and ANC, came together going into the election. The White community realized that if you can watch this on TV now, what is it going to look like six months from now if we don't succeed in the endeavor? It was a blow to the national psyche.

Q: Yeah, a galvanizing moment. Some people call it "the hinge of history." Is that an appropriate metaphor for this moment?

CLEVERLEY: It was in a sense a small event in the broad panorama of South Africa's transition but such a meaningful hinge of history. On the day of the election, one of our daughters Kaarina, who was living with us, and our youngest son Markus, a senior in high school, went out with a video camera to interview the lines of people waiting to vote. There was a law that you were not allowed to film waiting voters, but everybody wanted to talk to the two young Americans. It's a fascinating video to watch for us now, to see what people felt that moment just before they voted.

South Africa's Transition

After all the turmoil, the election turned out to be peaceful and memorable. One lady I saw the next week wore a t-shirt that told it all. On the shirt was written, "I am the new South Africa." We took our gardener to a movie. He had never been in a movie theater before. He was the only Black there and really nervous. But nobody said anything. We sat there together and watched the movie, and it was a big experience for him.

The inauguration was a potential flashpoint. We weren't sure what was going to happen at the inauguration because it was a last chance for the Right to strike if they were determined to do so. We were trying to think through various types of scenarios that might play out. The most likely one was that it would be just fine, but you could never discount the possibility of somebody throwing a bomb into the crowd. Some people stayed away. But the many people and delegations coming from the United States planned to join the program, not stay away. Hillary Clinton and Vice President Gore came and there was a large congressional delegation, as well. Many prominent figures from Black America joined a civil society delegation.

My job was to support the civil delegation that included many VIPs. We wanted to ensure security and provide logistical support to make things as easy as possible for them. I remember looking around the large hotel holding room to see Colin Powell in one corner, looking down like he was nobody. Quincy Jones, the Rev. Sharpton, and many who came to witness this historical moment were also present. There were no bombs and in the evening everyone was dancing at the inauguration ball.

The point remained, however, that once Mandela was inaugurated, the country still had a dual economy full of want and deep-rooted inequality. There were bridges to be built between the two sides. And the White population needed a tremendous amount of reassurance. The South Africa Black community always knew that they were a majority and would one day rule. The White population feared the transition because they knew the same thing, Whites were a minority. This raised a whole list of questions about what

the transition meant for the White minority. They were the ones who were the businessmen, engineers, doctors, and politicians. They were the people with the money, the people who ran the mining companies and other big companies that were so important to the economy. The last thing ANC wanted was for those people to vote with their feet and move abroad. The awe that just about everybody had for Mandela came from his ability to understand things that should be simple but in a racial environment were very difficult. He understood that reassuring the White community was existential. The movie *Invictus* had it right.

Q: Invictus. I was going to ask if that resonated and if it captured visually and, in the storytelling, the moment you were talking about.

CLEVERLEY: It was a real story, and it was a real moment. What it described really mattered. Mandela also recognized that many people in the Afrikaner community feared deeply that they would be marginalized. They had their own language. They had their own culture. They had their own history. They had all of the ingredients for being a nation of their own. And now, if they were marginalized, it would certainly motivate people who still belonged to the AWB. They were still a potential force, the neo-Nazis. Reassuring the Afrikaner community, Mandela understood, could emasculate the AWB types.

Very early on in his presidency, Mandela asked if he could speak to the Pretoria City Council. Pretoria was one of the main centers of the Afrikaner population. Most of the councilors were Afrikaners. The mayor agreed and gave him a time. When he addressed them, Mandela spoke in the Afrikaans language. He told them that Afrikaans was a respected language, as important as any other language in South Africa. His message was that Afrikaners and their culture were as important as any of the nations in South Africa. This was one of those small moments that made all the difference. When the Afrikaners heard him say that in Afrikaans, I think they began to believe this was a man they could trust.

Maybe a couple months later, I went to Johannesburg early one morning for a meeting of the board of the South African American Chamber of Commerce. One of the executives was a White South African who said he had an invitation to Cape Town to attend a meeting with businesspeople. Mandela would be there, and he added, "I'll tell you what I think of him when I get back." He was apprehensive, just like everybody else in the White business community. The next month at the same meeting, he was there and told what happened. He said, "Well, I went. I went to Cape Town and heard Mandela speak to us." And then he added, "I can't really explain it, but what I can only say is I feel like I met the Christ."

Q: I've met the Christ?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. I guess it's good to clarify that South Africans across most of the ethnic spectrum were quite religious, and such a comment can be put into that context. What he meant was that he had met someone who was going to save them.

Q: By putting it in biblical language, what was he doing?

CLEVERLEY: He convinced everybody in the room that Mandela intended to save their country in spite of all its baggage. Sometime after the election, I went to an event in Johannesburg where Mandela was to speak to a relatively small group of businessmen. Much of the senior ANC and government leadership was sitting there, dressed in dark suits. About fifteen minutes after the meeting was supposed to have begun, Mandela entered from the back, with his grandson holding his hand. The small boy was probably about six or seven. The two of them walked up the aisle and sat on the front row, not the stand. When Mandela's time to talk came, he rose to the podium and gave his speech.

I suppose this was meant to show these people that he was a no-nonsense man, and people were important. He was not going to play games with them. It's good to remember how revered this man was among the majority of his people, and how feared he was among those who didn't know him. He approached these businessmen on a very personal level, and it sent a message to the people sitting there. He played his role to perfection.

Initially, many in the White community harbored fears about Mandela and his party. Our neighbors shared these concerns, and we tried to calm them with what we had seen. Most of the White population soon found that Mandela would not stand in the way of the market economy. There was a lot of concern he would. One of his biggest elements in the ANC was the South African Communist Party. But Mandela understood perfectly well the role the private economy had to play in South Africa. Many also feared the high levels of violence everyone experienced. Violence was rampant, but after the election it was not political violence but criminal violence.

Q: Was this before or after the elections?

CLEVERLEY: The fear of political violence before the election turned to a fear of criminal violence immediately afterward. In the aftermath of the political violence, the idea of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was current. Shortly thereafter, they implemented a commission to review cases of people who had been convicted for political crimes, some of them terrible crimes. And if the commission found that the acts were done for political motives, perpetrators, on either side, might be released from imprisonment or pardoned. It was an effective process that began releasing the tension from society.

Q: Talk about that a little bit because one, it was not a defined but certainly, if my understanding of the history is correct, deeply rooted in common Christian religious principles and language and modus. Talk a little bit about how it came about or your perception of how it came about, because Desmond Tutu is very associated with it. Mandela was very associated with it. How did the Truth and Reconciliation proceed? Who were the main drivers and how did it, in what timeframe did it come together?

CLEVERLEY: Mandela was the founder of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Tutu chaired it. Of course, there were a lot of important people in South Africa who supported it. Most of all, it offered a chance to bring light to atrocities of the past and for some to seek forgiveness from those they wronged.

The South African Council of Churches also played a role both in the anti-apartheid movement and later in healing the nation's wounds. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was one of its general secretaries, as was later Frank Chikane. When Chikane visited Washington during the late 1980s, the South African secret police tried to assassinate him by lacing his clothing with poison. He became deathly ill and was hospitalized for a couple of weeks. No one knew the cause and when he was released and returned to his hotel room, his clothes immediately poisoned him again. Investigators then realized that someone was trying to kill him because they didn't want him in Washington. He told later our ambassador Princeton Lyman over a dinner one evening that he had just got a call from a man, a former police officer, who confessed he was the one who poisoned his clothing. The caller asked for Chikane's forgiveness.

Q: Wow.

CLEVERLEY: Chikane said that this was something very hard to do. But there was a level of forgiveness there.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Do you think the Truth and Reconciliation would ever work in America?

CLEVERLEY: Perhaps under certain circumstances. We haven't recently had the brutality South Africans suffered during those years. We have had police brutality and mass shootings, but the political violence during the era of apartheid and through the transition was so much more pervasive in South Africa.

Q: Yeah. Well, it was a historical hinge moment, that was much more compacted and defined than a hundred and fifty years of history, or two hundred and fifty years of history.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it was compacted and focused on a specific historical moment.

Q: What do you think made it work in South Africa? You had leadership, you had a historically, galvanizing, dramatic moment. You had common Christianity. In other words, a biblical language in common to draw on, both in terms of principles, in terms of faith, in terms of psychology. Was there anything else that enabled this?

CLEVERLEY: It really drew on all of those things. They were religious people. Forgiveness was something that was in their lexicon and their belief structure. So, it wasn't something new. Violence was so pervasive, nearly everyone had lost somebody somewhere along the line. I believe that after seeing how the ANC government had taken power gently in the aftermath of the election, people came to the conclusion they had to put those times behind them. It was time to move forward.

Q: Yeah. So, it was a way for everybody to go forward. And you have enough people at least to have decided that it was the only way to get from the past to the future. Is that fair?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I think it's fair. There was a lot of goodwill that existed, quite ironically, on the part of Black South Africans, but Whites, too.

Q: Well, they knew each other.

CLEVERLEY: They knew each other.

Q: For good and bad, they knew each other.

CLEVERLEY: It was surprising how quickly they learned to work together. Especially in the countryside, many Black and White South Africans had known, played, and worked with each other since they were young. In their adult world, the burdens of apartheid changed everything. I admire the Black South African character and personality. They were so willing to find cheer in those dark moments through humor and song. Perhaps, it was what an African American NGO [non governmental organization] worker told me. Black South Africans had a realization that they were in the end the majority, and South Africa was or would eventually be their country.

A Family in South Africa

As we get close to the end of this discussion of our time in South Africa, I might say a word about how our family fared during these years. Our youngest son, Markus, was a high school senior the year we arrived. He adapted quickly to the new environment and was elected student body president a few weeks after school started. He was caught up in the euphoria of the approaching transition. But he also saw the raw side of the time and place we shared. He knew of the atrocities and violence. One morning on the way to school, he saw a man jump from an overpass into the traffic below.

Our daughter, Kaarina, graduated from college and came to live with us and work for USAID in preschool education. She went out into a lot of the disadvantaged communities, helping set up preschools or places where young children could learn before they actually started grade school. She made friends with many Black South African fellow workers and learned the inside story of the suffering many families went through. Her sister, Kristiina, and our oldest son Mika, both spent a few months living with us between university years. All of them had a chance to make friends and share the historical moment the country was going through.

One summer when the contractor running the embassy's cafeteria suddenly canceled their contract, the embassy was desperate to find someone quickly to keep it in operation. Our boys ingeniously told the Management Counselor that they would take on the job until a new contractor was found. But, they said, they would offer only two things for lunch each

day: hot dogs and their mother's cinnamon rolls. Everyone laughed at the idea, but it was the best one—or only one—out there, and Mika and Markus were soon spending their lunch hours serving hot dogs and Finnish rolls to a hungry staff. It lasted only a few weeks, but the affair was an amusing and refreshing change in an atmosphere of busy and stressful jobs.

Seija regularly worked with a sewing project organized by the International Wives Club. They went into one of the townships to teach women to sew. Surprisingly, this was not a skill that many of them had. She spent two days a week helping them learn how.

Q: What about technology? Did they provide machines, or were they teaching basic hand stitching first?

CLEVERLEY: They were very poor and had nothing. The women learned very quickly, though, and soon were sewing drapes and curtains that they started selling in Pretoria. It took on quickly and became a little cottage industry for people who were living in difficult circumstances. Seija saw homes where the walls were made of cereal boxes. In winter when it was cold, the cereal boxes helped only a little to keep out the wind. Their project was very successful. The women even started their own bank account.

Q: Micro Financing.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, and one of the probably ten thousand success stories that were happening on the very bottom rung of society, helping people cope with poverty and unemployment. Unemployment in the black community was thirty, forty percent, so, a lot of people didn't have work. There was no public social safety net to assist people who didn't have a job. The only social net that existed was your family and extended family. They all tried to take care of each other.

Rampant Criminal Violence

Seija also spent much time organizing events in our home. One weekend, we had a dinner party in our house. One of the families we invited was a young Black South African couple from Johannesburg, who had a successful business. They didn't show up, and they didn't call. So, my Finnish wife was unhappy thinking they could have at least called saying they weren't going to make it. On Monday, they did phone to apologize. They said their car was carjacked that day.

Q: Oh dear.

CLEVERLEY: They said that the police told them they were fortunate they were still alive. For the carjackers, whether they killed an occupant or not was really a toss-up. The main reason they didn't kill more was because they didn't want to saturate the seats with blood and make it harder to sell the car and its parts.

Q: Was that mostly black on black or was it indiscriminate or?

CLEVERLEY: It didn't matter whether you were Black or White. Violence, such as carjacking, was criminal, and for criminals the victims' skin color mattered little. It was a source of great concern for us because we had a daughter there who was driving around. She was already out of college, and we felt we couldn't say "This is your curfew." My wife never slept until she got home at night.

That same weekend our guests were carjacked, we went to church and an older White lady got up and asked for some time to speak. She and her adult daughter were friends of ours. She told how the night before she had been at home with her grandchildren, and some men had cut the telephone line, killed the dogs, and entered the house. They wanted everything she could give them. They put her in chains, walked her through the house looking for guns, jewelry, whatever was there. She said, "The only reason they didn't kill me was my belief in Jesus Christ." My faith concentrated my mind and gave me the presence I needed to survive that horrible moment. They raped her and her granddaughters. I was shocked that day when she told us this story and still am. It remains a memory of South Africa that does not leave my mind.

Q: Yeah, a testament. Now, to just be clear. There was a Mormon church there, and this was a Mormon church that you were attending?

CLEVERLEY: Yes.

Q: And was it a mixed store or a white congregation?

CLEVERLEY: Theoretically, it was mixed, but it was really White. Church congregations are geographical and there were a lot of congregations.

Q: Was it in your neighborhood?

CLEVERLEY: It was fairly close.

Q: Were there a lot of Mormon churches in Pretoria or just one or two? Or—

CLEVERLEY: Probably around fifteen or twenty in the broader Pretoria area.

Q: Fifteen to twenty, yeah. Wow.

CLEVERLEY: Most congregations were Black but in the city of Pretoria there were a couple that were White, simply because there were hardly any Black South Africans yet living in the city.

Q: How did the congregation react to this bone-chilling story?

CLEVERLEY: Well, everybody was shocked and sympathetic. It wasn't a story they had not heard before, however. I think the South Africans understood it better than we did as

foreigners. South Africans had heard and experienced many such stories. For us Americans, it was something we had not been so close to before.

The next day, the woman who lived in the house behind us went out at noon to get her car, and there was a man in the garage who stabbed and killed her. So, that was one weekend: dinner guests carjacked Friday, a friend from church attacked on Saturday, and our neighbor was murdered on Monday. It was very shocking in a way to realize that the society around us lived so close to rampant violence. It wasn't something we only read in the newspaper, but it was happening to those around us. The new government did not—or was not able to—deal effectively with the criminal violence, and it would continue.

Q: The effectiveness of law depends on social consensus beneath it. You had the laws, but those don't deal with the historical past and realities.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that's true. And also, there was the holdover apartheid structure within the police force. These were policemen who had been trained to deal with riots and civil disobedience types of events, not solving crimes. So, there was a group in society doing outrageous things and no police force adequately prepared to deal with criminals. Although this was the prevailing explanation for the out-of-control criminality of the time, I think it wasn't just ineffective policing. But the new ANC government agreed they had to restructure the police force and considered crime one of the biggest challenges the new government faced.

Cry the Beloved Country, one of South Africa's greatest novels, was written in the late 1940s and talks about the same violence and tragedies we saw fifty years later. And the violence continues still today, thirty years after the transition. When you have two starkly different worlds overlaid atop each other—a wealthy first world society and an impoverished third world country where over a third struggle to find work—there is fertile ground for violent crime.

Q: This might be a good place on that rather dramatic and chilling story to take a breath and in this session, think about what you want to, one, whether there are any more stories, incidents, insights. And then certainly, to sum up, to start the next session. And we'll go forward then to your next assignment which was DCM Helsinki. We'll need to know also how that came about.

CLEVERLEY: I'll do that. Let me close by saying when we went to the airport on our departure, we climbed on board the plane, looked at each other, and agreed it had been an exciting assignment, but South Africa was a country we would never return to. We harbored too many sad and hard memories. A year later, however, we were back, buying a timeshare in Sun City, a resort area on the Botswana-South Africa border. We were to come back many times, and we still have a timeshare there. An "African bug" had gotten into our blood.

Q: That is a wonderful note to end on. I'll ask you to elaborate a bit on how and why the shift, you know, a whole lot of sum up—how it changed you and the rest of your Foreign

Service career or life, whatever. We'll start with that next time. That's wonderful, thank you.

Q: This is Stephanie Kinney, interviewing Mike Cleverley for his oral history. This is session nine, being conducted on March 21, 2022. Mike, we, last session, pretty much closed out your time in Pretoria as the economic counselor to the embassy in South Africa. But before we move to how you got your next assignment, what it was and your arrival as DCM in Helsinki, I wonder to what extent, if at all, you found yourself changed? Or were you impacted personally as a result of your experience in Pretoria at this very important time in South African history?

What I took from Pretoria

CLEVERLEY: Yes, we left a little battered and bruised from the roughness of the times. But we also left enriched with the thought that seemingly unsolvable situations can be fixed. I learned an appreciation for South Africans across the spectrum, and for the way they carved a peaceful transition from a dark past to a brighter future. And personally, I had been immersed in an entirely new set of issues from what I knew in my previous assignments. I was a more experienced manager when I left, a better one, I think. The management problems I had encountered through the assignment had not always been easy.

A posting to Pretoria in 1993 was a sought-after assignment many officers hoped for. It was a time in history, and the job offered a chance to work from the embassy observing that moment in a way many others would never have, and perhaps you, yourself, would not have in many assignments. It was often stressful for both things happening outside the embassy and inside. My wife and I agreed, on the day we left, we would never come back to South Africa. But a year later, we were back buying a timeshare.

In retrospect, one thing I regret is a self-righteous attitude or approach that we Americans sometimes took to the process. Sometimes, it seemed like we owned this moment. We were trying to move the transition in a safe, peaceful, and fruitful direction, but it was their moment. We were observers. And I think sometimes we got carried away with it. I think we White employees at the embassy perhaps forgot that we had our own struggles that were hardly resolved. It is surprising now, from today's perspective, to see how the South Africans seem to have done better with their racial issues than we have.

Many African American visitors sometimes appeared to think of it as their moment. It was something that they identified with, of course. But even in that case, this was not an American story. I remember visits by Hazel O'Leary, energy secretary in the Clinton administration. She was an African American who Clinton had empowered to spearhead a lot of his administration's engagement in South Africa.

She came with planeloads of people, of staff, and it was extremely difficult to deal with them because they thought they owned the city. One time, after we finally got them in the

air on an Air Force aircraft bound for Cape Town, I went home, sat on my porch and just tried to calm down. It had been forty-eight hours of total busyness and stress. While sitting there, I got a call to say they had decided halfway between Johannesburg and Cape Town that they weren't going to Cape Town after all, and they were on their way back to Pretoria.

Q: Oh my god, the arrogance.

CLEVERLEY: Whitney Houston gave a big concert in South Africa after the election and said, "I have come home!" The comment was headlines, not because Black South Africans were delighted that she said it, but because South Africa was not her home. An American pop star was far removed from the struggles of the Black South Africans.

Another big lesson I took away from this assignment was how resolving embassy management problems quickly is a prerequisite for effective output. It's so easy for us as foreign service officers to let seemingly small and sometimes even big problems linger and not do anything about them. We know we are going to be reassigned in a year or two, and somebody else can worry about it. But problems managers neglect can create havoc for your programs, and overall, for your efficiency. And I say efficiency in the sense of getting the most output from the meager resources we have in the State Department or at an embassy. We really do need to get the best output possible, and management problems can be a big drain on our efforts. So, in a nutshell, these are some of the things that now in 2022 remain in my mind.

Q: That's wonderful. What did you mean exactly by "in some ways?" They, the South Africans, have handled—or made perhaps more progress—on race more than we? Meaning, as I understood it, the United States? Is that from a 2022 perspective? Was it something that you came to appreciate at that time? Because the road forward as with any new nation, our own included way back when, is never a straight line and it's filled with "two steps forward, one step back." And people tend to emphasize the negative over the positive. So, American perceptions of South Africa may not fully understand or appreciate what—some American perceptions of South Africa in recent years, for example, may not line up. I don't really understand what you were intending to say. What did "better" mean?

CLEVERLEY: Well, 2022 is a year when we've been through some really serious racial issues in the United States. And many Americans I think are broadly coming to realize that these issues were not as resolved as we hoped they had been a decade or two decades ago. Unfortunately, in 1993 or 1995 when I was in South Africa, we weren't humbled as much as we are today. Today, you can see race still as a big issue in the United States. You don't have riots over Black Lives Matter in South Africa. Of course, South African Blacks are the majority, and there are racial issues still to contend with. In any society where there is great diversity, especially racial diversity, there is bound to be a level of friction, as people try to work out routines and ways of living with people who are a little different from themselves.

But they seem to have gotten past the major hurdles that we are still struggling with. Most South Africans today are comfortable with the concept of a non-racial society. South Africa did not transition from apartheid to something like it, as the American South transitioned directly from slavery to segregation and sanctioned inequality. Not to say that life is easy in South Africa. They still have a huge disparity in their economy where the Black population is much, much poorer than the White on average. And they still have tremendous amounts of violence, something that has to be taken into consideration anytime someone visits South Africa. But the violence is criminal. It's not racial like it was before. And this is something that I came to see over the years following my tour in South Africa.

Q: Yeah, that's very important to note.

CLEVERLEY: On the streets of Johannesburg, there are people wanting to steal your car, your wallet, or whatever it happens to be. But we have racially motivated violence. We haven't resolved that well enough yet, and you see how it fits so strongly in the center of the political cleavage we have in the United States.

Q: How broad and clean are South African voting practices and procedures today?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I suppose, they are probably better than in many other countries in Africa. But the ANC has maintained a hold on society that it certainly doesn't deserve. Corruption has become a problem. We saw it with their previous president. There should have been an opposition that could step in to share power over time. It would have been an important cleansing opportunity for them, like it is in any country. But the ANC always has had a great respect and loyalty to the past, and the people who supported them still control them.

Helsinki, Finland 1996-1999

Q: Yeah, I can't help but be struck by the points that reference and the contact with our own recent history, the majority is different than the majority in South Africa. And the majority-minority are reversed, but it is interesting that many of the dynamics and observations that you are making about South Africa seem to me to have a counterpart in our own recent past. It's a humbling experience. Well, if you don't have any other observations or thoughts on South Africa, and these were we're deliciously pregnant with rich content, let's talk about how your assignment to Helsinki came up? Did you go after it? Did they come after you? When did you learn that you were going to be going from Pretoria to Helsinki? Did you have home leave in between? What was that like? And then, you were going to arrive not as a counselor but as a Deputy Chief of Mission. So, tell us about that.

CLEVERLEY: I always had an ambition to be DCM in Helsinki and was glad to see it was opening at the time I was leaving Pretoria, and I went after the job. There were of course two or three dozen applicants for that particular position.

Q: Wow. Did they all speak Finnish?

CLEVERLEY: Finnish gave me a foot forward, obviously. A couple of them did speak Finnish, but the fact that I had had a previous assignment in Helsinki and I spoke Finnish helped out. I called several times Ambassador Derek Shearer who was making the selection to express my interest. One weekend, we traveled to a game park and were sitting out under the sun with hippos off to the side when I got a phone call that said Shearer planned to choose me for the DCM position. It was a direct transfer via home leave from Pretoria to Helsinki. We arrived in Helsinki probably in July of 1996.

Q: And were you going to a house with which you were familiar? Or had there been a change in the DCM residence in the interim?

CLEVERLEY: This is a very interesting question. Our new residence belonged to the DCM when we were on our first tour. At that time, there had been a fire in the residence. The DCM had told the security officer that some people had thrown a Molotov cocktail at the door. They were able to get the fire out, but it destroyed the library and more. As it turned out, that wasn't exactly what happened. I heard years later that he and his wife had a drinking problem. Who knows exactly what happened, but the fire was their responsibility.

I had seen the home many years before that. When I was a missionary in Helsinki, I was assigned to that area. Once we walked by, and I was so impressed by the residence that I had taken a picture of it. Thirty years later, when we moved in, I still had the slide. I didn't even know who lived in it when I took the photo.

Q: Oh, wow. Had it been properly restored?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it was a beautiful residence on the sea, and we bought a small motorboat. But most importantly for us, it had a small sauna house right next to the water. You could jump from the sauna right into the sea. In Finland, something like this was invaluable for representation. We used it a lot over the three years we were there to entertain dozens of people.

Q: Was it in a diplomatic enclave or was it in a regular neighborhood?

CLEVERLEY: It was in a regular neighborhood. There was no diplomatic enclave in Finland. The residence was not in the center, but in the suburbs, a little isolated. The embassy had purchased it in what turned out to be a good buy for the United States government.

Q: If I may, I want to go back just a little bit. You earlier said your heart had always been set on DCM Helsinki, but you were never particularly interested in being an ambassador. Could you elaborate on that? Explain what you meant? Why?

CLEVERLEY: Well, it seemed to me earlier in my career that an ambassador was often more of a representational job. The DCM and many other officers engaged in issues and management. Later when I was more experienced, post management seemed to interest me more than what the ambassador did. Sure, there was the glory of being an ambassador, and I later met and worked with ambassadors who got involved deeply with substance (but fewer who got into post management). I knew a lot of officers whose great ambition was to be an ambassador, but I was interested in the basic thrust of the mission. I also learned career officers rarely got a chance to serve as ambassadors in Europe, where I wanted to work. But there were many great DCM jobs there—a trade-off. And so I remained ambivalent, not sure whether an ambassadorship was worth it for me. Later in my career, I had a couple of opportunities that I turned down to do something I wanted to do, rather than one that might have led more in that direction.

Q: Yeah, I did the same thing. Interesting. I think that is perhaps a recommendation that you should have been ambassador.

CLEVERLEY: Perhaps, I don't know.

Q: But your choice was the fulfillment of a dream at that time. So, tell us about the experience. Tell us about the degree to which it met expectations or not?

Finland 1996

CLEVERLEY: Well, okay. Let me say a word about Finland in 1996. The Finland that I found in 1996 was quite different from the one I had left thirteen years before. So much had changed. Sometimes, you can go to a country thirteen years later, and you don't see a lot of changes. It's pretty much the same, but in Finland, a lot had changed.

Q: Yeah, may I just—you said that there was no diplomatic enclave, and my memory may be faulty and my experience was superficial and sketchy because I was an inner and an outer—but, something in my head from 1993-1994 period. Very close to when the Russians were, we were trying to get the Russians totally out of the Baltics. I had the impression that there was one.

CLEVERLEY: No, but there was an enclave for the Russians.

Q: But not for the rest of the diplomatic corps?

CLEVERLEY: Not for the rest of the diplomatic corps. It was a very easy place to live, an easy environment for diplomatic missions to arrange housing. And there weren't the security issues that often you are trying to handle with an enclave. None of that existed. So, it was easier just to let people find places to live, or to find places for them to live.

Q: Did they tend to clump together in particular or were they spread all over?

CLEVERLEY: A lot of officers liked living in the center of Helsinki, not far from the embassy in apartments that tended to be a little bit smaller than what we might normally want for an embassy. We also had a lot of single officers or young families because it was a small mission, and many positions were relatively junior grade. Apartments worked well for somebody without a family, or for those who were married without many children. For those who needed more room, the western suburbs were attractive and popular. In fact, Tapiola near where we lived during both tours was the model for the Reston planned community.

Q: That may be what I'm vaguely—because it was a sense of a place, a little outside of the city. Beautiful, wooded, I think there were hills even. And that was the reason for my curiosity.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, that's right. And there were a number of families that lived there, especially more senior officers and officers with children.

Q: I didn't know about the model for Reston. That's fascinating.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, the Finns unfortunately didn't keep it up like they should have. But I lived in Tapiola when I was a missionary for a few months, and it was absolutely spectacular. It was beautiful with woods and extensive gardens. They changed the flowers three times over the summer, and it was called the garden city. The people who developed Reston had seen Tapiola and thought the planning idea was intriguing. As it turned out, Reston was much better organized and managed, at least it is today if you compare the two.

Q: Interesting, interesting. Glad I asked. Please, go back to your narrative.

CLEVERLEY: There were at least two things which made Finland different from when I had been there before. One, was the fall of the Soviet Union, which had had such a pervasive influence in Finland over the post-war years. Coming with the disappearance of the Soviet Union was the collapse of those Soviet markets that the Finns had cultivated over the previous two or three decades. Finland was in a deep recession. For example, Seija's hometown, Lahti, had been a progressive business community known for its wood and paper companies, furniture production, and textile products. The textile plants completely collapsed because their production had been destined greatly for the Soviet Union. The furniture industry took a huge hit, and the smaller companies disappeared. The big lumber and wood factories were closed. All that occurred in the early 1990s when they lost the Soviet markets and underwent a banking crisis.

Q: But mostly because the Soviet markets themselves had collapsed. In other words, they couldn't afford to buy the products. Is that a correct assumption?

CLEVERLEY: Yes. And because trade between Finland and the Soviet Union was on a barter arrangement, the loss of Finland's Soviet customers meant Finland could no longer pay for Russian oil with its own products.

Q: Yes, so, barter in the 20th century, late 20th century.

CLEVERLEY: So, Russia still had oil to sell, but it was not obligated to buy Finland's products. They could buy products anywhere in the Western markets, any products that they could afford. They started to diversify their supplier network in many countries.

Q: Yeah. All of that is extremely important detail.

CLEVERLEY: We talked earlier about how Finland had exploited the Soviet Union through the trade relationship. Now they no longer had a monopolist position but faced a lot of competition from the West—Sweden and Norway, Germany and elsewhere.

The second big thing that had changed was that Finland had joined the European Union in 1995 along with Sweden. This created a huge change in Finland's geopolitical positioning. Its neutrality was now embroidered into a Western framework.

The fact that Russia was economically and politically on its knees during those years, changed things a lot. Finland, perhaps to the regret of many Finns, did not immediately join NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] then like Estonia and the other Balkan countries did. I would consider that a huge mistake, because it would have been a window that they probably could have gone through, but didn't. But nevertheless, they did join the European Union.

Q: Did they do it out of that residual edge with the West? Or was it fear of the “Big Brother” next door, and they didn't want to endanger their neutrality? All of these kinds of questions, of course, as we're speaking during the brutal Putin war on Ukraine because of its desire to turn west right now, of course, seem very much more relevant and very much more germane, all of the sudden. So, can you elaborate on turning down NATO? Because the rumor now is, well, maybe it is time to change their mind.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. Finland carried a lot of political and historical baggage into the post-Soviet period. One of the things Finland learned from World War II was that perhaps they could have avoided the Winter War with the Soviet Union if they had given Stalin a greater sense of security. They took that lesson with them very carefully into the post war period thinking that it made sense from Finland's security point of view to make sure they continually sent a message to the Russians that the long border with Finland was not dangerous nor threatening. In my view, they took it almost to an extreme. In the immediate post-war years, they didn't want to give the Soviet Union any incentive to get involved in Finland's domestic politics. That wasn't the case four decades later.

As Finland entered the 1990s, a majority of Finns were still asking why they should get involved with NATO, a military alliance, if it made the Russians feel less secure on the Finnish border. This was especially the psyche among the socialists, who always played a large role in Finnish politics and traditionally considered NATO equivalent to the Warsaw

Pact. Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine, of course, pulled off the blinders, and within months a large majority of Finns were ready to join NATO.

The President of Finland in 1996 was Martti Ahtisaari, a professional diplomat in the UN [United Nations] system. After he left office in the early 2000s, he won the Nobel Peace Prize for the work he did in Africa and the Balkans wearing his UN hat and his hat as president of Finland.

One last thing I would say about Finland, attitudes towards the United States had changed a lot, too. That's because they didn't have to balance their policies between the West and the East in the same way they thought they had to during the Soviet era. They were quite happy working with us on many fronts.

Finland bought F-18s from the United States and started structuring its military with American equipment. They also were quick to join Partnership for Peace [PFP], an element within the NATO system where non-NATO members could cooperate with NATO in creating a force structure compatible with NATO's. If there was a NATO action and they wanted to participate, they could participate without problems related to communications, weaponry, or things like that. Finland was probably our best PFP partner.

Q: Yeah. Could I ask you at this point, because you are pointing to a very significant reality in a geostrategic arena and moment of history increasingly defined by superpowers—you are speaking about the extraordinary power, influence, utility, value, mostly of small countries. Finland had eight million people, five million?

CLEVERLEY: Five million.

Finland's Road to NATO

Q: Yeah, yeah, I'm thinking '93 and maybe they've grown, but also maybe they have the same fertility issue we do, which is modern women don't feel the need for eight children. Especially if they're working, especially if they are breadwinners. So, you are pointing to this value of strongly cultivated and nurtured, true relationships, partnerships with small countries, as well as the biggies. Could you reflect on that? Or perhaps use Finland as an example?

CLEVERLEY: Well, Finland always thought that it could, as a small country, still shore up its security against the Soviet Union, or Russia later, by cooperating carefully with other countries such as the other, whose numbers started to add up. They had a lot of common history and cultural issues. Finland belonged to Sweden for hundreds of years.

But it's one thing to say that as a small country you can defend yourself, and it's another to actually do it. It's just what you see today: the Ukraine is not such a small country. And yet, it wasn't able to establish a secure space for itself. And I think that message was very disconcerting to Finns. Even though they may have a modern capable military and a large

army when mobilized, and they have the confidence of taking on the Russians if they need to—after all, they beat the Russian hockey team in the Olympics—pure numbers, time, and space are always on the side of the Russians.

Q: Maybe one of the reasons Putin is pissed.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, that's right. Over the Cold War, Finland did not expect the Russians to invade them next month, but that doesn't seem as remote a possibility as it once did. And if they were going to talk about security, which is a long-term process, they had to take that into consideration.

Q: Yeah. But I was thinking more also about the value to the United States, of small countries.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, even the smallest country has something to offer the alliance: location, reach, intellectual input, and so on. Partnership for Peace gave us greater outreach for the security umbrella. However, a small country outside the umbrella can be a vulnerability for the United States as well.

Q: No, because if the flag goes up, we're obligated.

Ambassador Derek Shearer

CLEVERLEY: When I arrived, the embassy was led by Derek Shearer. Derek was a professor at Occidental College. He got his PhD at Yale in American Studies and was a true expert in world affairs.

Q: Was he a political appointee?

CLEVERLEY: He was a political appointee, by Clinton. He had known Clinton during their college years and was roommates at Yale with Strobe Talbott.

Q: Oh, there you go.

CLEVERLEY: Strobe Talbott married Derek's sister, and Strobe knew Clinton. Derek's wife, Ruth Goldway, was former mayor of Santa Monica. They were well connected in the Democratic Party. And Derek was on board with Clinton during his first run for president. He got his job as ambassador mainly because of his service to the Clinton campaign. Derek and Ruth were friends with Bill and Hillary before Clinton was president.

That was Derek's background. I consider him one of the best ambassadors I worked for. It's always good to keep in mind that career foreign service officers don't have a monopoly on good ambassadorships. Sometimes there are outstanding people brought in. I mean, Derek, he could talk about any international issue, was a wise administrator, and played the social season as well as anybody.

Q: You said that he could talk the talk, meaning he had full command of policy and issues, bilateral and international issues. Regional issues. And I think you were going to say something else.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, we never had any trouble getting a press conference together. The press people were always delighted to come to the embassy for a breakfast chat with Derek. And he took advantage of that. He was a very good communicator and presented American positions strongly. He was also very good with people. He fit into the Finnish social scene very quickly. He was a smart and interested manager but didn't want to spend a lot of time on the process.

Q: But he had you. That's what you were for.

CLEVERLEY: He had me oversee management. It wasn't like he didn't care, but he didn't want to get in the middle either. So, it worked. It was very functional, and it was a very good embassy.

Finland's Evolving Female Leadership

Q: Yeah. What made him, I mean, these are all positive attributes. But you know, what made him a good ambassador for the time you were there and the particular moment? He knew the president firsthand, so he could, he really could pick up the phone.

CLEVERLEY: He did. He and Ruth stopped by the White House when in Washington. He asked Hillary, as first lady, to come to visit. Finns loved it because Finns were evolving very rapidly towards a non-gender society, especially in government. The minister of Defense, the Speaker of Parliament, the head of the Central Bank, and many other leaders were women. It is even more so today.

Q: Why?

CLEVERLEY: As you may have heard the current prime minister is a young woman, as are the heads of several parties who serve in the coalition government. Finnish women are very effective, and Finnish men don't resent the effectiveness of women within society.

Q: Why not?

CLEVERLEY: It's an egalitarian society that has quickly adopted modern attitudes of efficiency that are not gender-based.

Q: But you just said something revolutionary. They were evolving towards a female-led government. It's unimaginable in the United States.

CLEVERLEY: No, we're still so far behind. We do have prominent women in our society, of course. But I can't imagine a presidential cabinet being dominated by women, Not yet.

Q: But, thus far, we haven't been able to have a woman president.

CLEVERLEY: Derek took advantage of the strong role women were playing in Finland. He brought it up, both in his speeches in the United States and in Finland. Public diplomacy was big for him. He got the Finnish defense force to let him fly in the backseat of an F-18. He was just looking for opportunities. At the hockey game, he was a personality. Every afternoon, he would be seen walking with Ruth along the seafront. He was very visible.

Q: How old were you at that time?

CLEVERLEY: I was forty-nine when I arrived.

Ambassador Eric Edelman

Q: So, you had a good cohort?

CLEVERLEY: He was only there a year. We had another election. Clinton was re-elected, and Derek went on to other things. He had been there three years and came back to the United States. Derek was replaced by Eric Edelman. Eric was also someone who knew Strobe Talbott well. Eric was a career officer and was chief of his staff when Talbott was deputy secretary. Eric was very bright and also had a PhD from Yale, in American Studies. There was about an eight-month vacancy when I served as Charge' d'Affaires, and we spent the last part of the tour with the Edelmans.

Q: How was his style different? Or his attributes compare and contrast? Not all ambassadors are the same. They are human beings, they are individuals.

CLEVERLEY: Eric was a good ambassador. He knew the issues. He was bright. He got up at six o'clock in the morning to read from the foreign press, what was possible to read on the internet in those days. He was always one of the best-informed people in Finland, I think. He was well connected into the State Department, having worked as Strobe's chief of staff. He was liked by the staff. But they weren't the same people. Derek was relaxed and Californian. Eric was more Eastern establishment, more State Department. So, there was a contrast, but the two of them nevertheless were among our finest ambassadors. I was lucky to work during both my Helsinki tours with some very good ambassadors. I felt privileged to work with them.

Q: Yeah. I mean, your career is amazing in terms of luck of the top dog drawer.

CLEVERLEY: That's true.

Q: Few people have had a career in quite a start.

The American Embassy 1996

CLEVERLEY: The embassy had about fifty-five Americans and over a hundred and fifty staff, all together. It was located right by the sea, so when the ferries between Helsinki and Stockholm entered port, you saw them just outside your window. We didn't have any consulates in Finland, but there was a secure facility we leased. The Moscow Embassy was under construction, and building materials for that construction were shipped from the United States via Helsinki on their way to Moscow. They were held in our secure facility before being transported by a truck to Moscow.

The political and economic section chiefs were FSO-2 officers. The post was very active because of Finland's membership in the European Union. We covered most of the same issues any embassy in a European Union country handled. We had two officers in the political section and two in the economic section.

As I said earlier, one of the lessons I took with me when I left South Africa was that if the front office didn't keep on top of the issues early on, you may pay a bigger price later. So, my attitude as a new DCM, and in later assignments as well, was that I needed to keep track of the different sections, making sure they were running smoothly. I didn't want to be looking over anyone's shoulder, but on the other hand, quality assurance had to come from the top.

One of the things I learned in the DCM course before going to Helsinki was a team's need to support each other. As an object lesson, they tied three ropes between two trees. The idea was that you stood on one rope and held onto the other two with each hand as you tried to walk from one tree to the next. When you first thought about it, it looked easy. But they said, "This isn't so easy as you think. When you get up there, you might need some help." And so, we had a person on either side of us ready to put their hands on our hips to balance us if we started swaying in one direction or the other. However, they would help only when we asked for it.

Q: Because what happens?

CLEVERLEY: As soon as you took a step you started swaying, and your balance started to slip. But your supporters were not going to help you unless you asked them. You kept thinking you would make it without any help. You took another two steps and started swaying widely. You still kept thinking I'm still going to make it, and don't need help. The tendency was to say, "No, I don't need help." Ultimately, if you didn't ask for help, you ended up down on the ground. What I learned was that many tasks, and especially the job of a DCM, require help from those around. And you have to ask for it.

The DCM in Post Management

I didn't want to be that kind of DCM who did everything by myself. I wanted to delegate and to give people an opportunity to do things on their own. But I didn't want any messes on my watch, because I didn't have time to clean up a lot myself. This was a tricky balance. I needed them to do the work, and I had to be there supporting them when they

needed it. In this regard, I found it a challenge as a DCM in a small embassy. Larger embassies have senior, experienced officers heading the sections. They've been around the block many times. It doesn't mean they are necessarily any more capable than younger officers, just that they have the benefit of experience.

Q: Yeah. They have seen some things before because they do repeat.

CLEVERLEY: They do repeat. I ended up working long, hard hours in Helsinki, spending a lot of time with my section chiefs and others.

Q: What did working mean? Did you meet with them regularly, daily? Did you walk the halls, and they could call on you, open door? Give us a sense of what working with the men meant operationally.

CLEVERLEY: They were either in my office or I was in theirs. Fortunately, the offices were close to each other. I was on the main floor, they were one floor up. We saw each other many times a day. In terms of reporting, I wanted to make sure it was as good as possible. I put effort into working through report drafts. I found that once you help an officer write something that really does look good, they learn. The next time, you do less.

That was particularly true with younger officers. It wasn't that they didn't know how to write, but they didn't necessarily know how to write in a State Department environment. Packaging really mattered for the readers of our cables when they had tens of others to read as well. I spent a lot of time with these younger officers,

Q: Did they call you sir? Did they address you by your title? Did they use your first name?

CLEVERLEY: I was "Mike." I wanted everyone to feel comfortable that we were on the same team. I felt much more comfortable in a collegial type of setting than in a hierarchical one. I wanted everyone to feel comfortable walking into my office. That was my management style. It was also quite time-consuming to spend time with officers, as opposed to working on issues. Often, I could have worked the issue faster than helping an officer deal with it.

Q: Which over time, what proportion of your job was management? Working with the embassy people, staff, making the institution hum, versus policy or issues?

CLEVERLEY: Over my career I had three DCM jobs. I would say that on average, probably 60 or 66 percent of my time went into management of one sort or another, and the rest was spent on other things.

Q: Do you know if the long-standing statistics still stands? I think, as of 2010, 50 percent of our DCMs fail.

CLEVERLEY: I don't know what it is today, but if that was the case in 2010, that was relatively good. When I went to the DCM course, they said something like ninety percent were not considered successful.

Q: Yeah, I want to ask you about the DCM course. This exercise was obviously genius and had a big impact on you. It made you understand in a way, what was meant that just talking wouldn't have the same effect. If you hadn't gotten on those ropes and physically experienced it. I feel like we—Kennan I think and others—have talked about diplomacy as gardening. I've long thought that we should start officers off with having to either build, create or maintain a garden, because only by doing that would they begin to understand what Kennan meant.

But talk a little bit about the DCM course, or you can do it later. But since you brought it up in this session, I didn't want to interrupt at the moment, but I was tempted to say, you know, what do you think about DCM training? Was it long enough? Was it complete enough? You know, what was good? What was lacking? What did you only learn through doing or after the effect, this might be a time to offer some thoughts on that? Because ninety percent failure when you were a DCM says mountains about a corporate culture that aspires but bogusly.

The DCM Course

CLEVERLEY: That's right. And it also tells about the preparation the culture provides for people when they are going into the DCM job.

Q: Yeah. And one of the things I want to hear your thoughts on is, why was it the way it was? What were the assumptions that underlay the reality that you lived, going into your first DCM-ship in 1996?

CLEVERLEY: I think the course was, if I remember correctly, a one-week course off site. Most of it.

Q: Where was it off site? In the woods?

CLEVERLEY: I can't remember the name of the place. It was in West Virginia.

Q: Yeah, it was probably in the woods because I think the other one that was in Berkeley, it was an earlier period. I can't remember the name right now.

CLEVERLEY: It was obviously put together by contractors. I don't know how well contractors per se understand the Foreign Service. It's a very unique type of work.

Q: Well, it's kind of bizarre to have a system where the formation and preparation is done by people who have no clue what diplomacy is, nor have they ever practiced it.

CLEVERLEY: It seemed to me that a lot of the course was oriented towards leadership, as opposed to addressing managerial issues DCMs face. They are not the same thing at all. I mean, that little exercise I mentioned was a good leadership type of thing. You learn the power and value of asking for support and of delegation. But the management aspect of a DCM job can be quite overpowering, and there are a lot of very serious types of issues: gender relationships, minority relationships, diversity, human resources, expenditures, budgets, and budgeting. All of these have a complex set of norms and regulations that a DCM will need to deal with, often more than she or he would like. I don't remember getting anything in the DCM course about budgeting, yet that's one of the biggest and most complex problems that you do as a DCM. I hadn't had a management assignment going into Helsinki and had to rely tremendously on my management officer. I know some DCMS have management backgrounds, so maybe it's not a big deal for them. Nevertheless, I thought the course should have talked a lot more about the nitty-gritty of post management, budgeting, resources, and so on.

Q: It's a different language. And a lot of our officers are trained to be monolingual rather than multilingual.

The DCM and Sensitive Personnel Issues

CLEVERLEY: A different language. A different track. It's not economic work (expanded), or Consular Work (expanded). As a DCM, you're going to encounter issues that you would have never imagined in the past.

Q: Can you explain? Give us an example?

CLEVERLEY: Well, yeah. While I was DCM—and this wasn't the last time, either—the spouse of an American employee threatened to kill him. He took it seriously enough to start sleeping in the car. She said she was going to stab him. For diplomatic staff beholden mainly to post management, this was an issue that had to be handled within the embassy, with limited enforcement or social support available. In the last analysis, it was the DCM's job to deal with.

Q: How did it come to your attention?

CLEVERLEY: How did it come to my attention? He went to the security officer to ask for help, and the security officer was in my office not too many hours after that. That's just one example of the complex situations that reach the DCM's desk. Another was the case of an officer who had a child with psychological and emotional problems. He and his wife were working on their next assignment and were afraid they would not get a medical clearance for the child. They were especially concerned about school records that elaborated on some of the things the child had done. So the officer met with the principal and while the principal was out of the room for a moment, he pulled the file of his daughter and removed what he didn't want there. It was not a very smart move, and he was caught in the act. Everything was brought to the embassy's attention, and, again, it

ultimately was the DCM's job to handle. In most cases the ambassador wanted to be kept informed of these matters but was more than happy to have the DCM manage them.

Q: But you had no clue going in?

CLEVERLEY: Not many clues on what to expect. You need good common sense, some good advice from key people around you, and often a lot of compassion.

Q: Is this an honor? Is this a corporate honesty problem? Or lack of imagination or not having a clue about reality and the real human problems that faced any DCM? What do you think accounts for the fact that you had no idea when you arrived in Helsinki that this kind of problem could land on your desk?

CLEVERLEY: Of course, most officers working in the embassy don't know that these things go on. Even the management officer may not know. The security officer or the medical officer are often informed, and you work with them.

Q: Because of confidentiality?

CLEVERLEY: Confidentiality. You're definitely not going to talk about these cases, not even with your spouse. You might discuss them with the ambassador, so he is on board. But they want you as DCM to take care of the problem. It is your job.

Q: It doesn't come out in the evaluations? It doesn't come out in some fashion?

CLEVERLEY: Well, handling many problems in the evaluation can be complicated. Let's say you have someone who has an addiction to alcohol. You can't put that in the officer's evaluation as long as they are adequately performing their duties. Even if they are not performing their duties well, you may still hesitate to put it in the evaluation. You can mention they weren't successful in their job, with examples, of course.

Q: Are people supposed to know what that means? Or is that part of the fundamental dishonesty problem?

CLEVERLEY: Well, it is a confidentiality problem. When I was working on personnel problems, such as these, I sometimes talked with the management officer on what we might do, but it was really the medical or security officers where I spent most of my time. So many of the problems had a medical, psychological or emotional component. If there is a medical twist, a person might be removed for medical reasons, and you can let Washington deal with it, through rehab or whatever. You also want to be sensitive to not destroy a person's career over an issue that might be resolved and later forgotten.

Q: So, the Foreign Service sounds very average and just like the rest of society. How does it get the charge of being so elite and unlike everybody else?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I don't know, but the thing is, foreign service is not so much like the rest of society. Our officers have the same problems as the rest of society. But because of the foreign environment that they are in, as well as the embassy where they work, they can't be dealt with as easily as they might be if they were back in Washington, D.C., or somewhere else at home.

Moreover, we all realize that the foreign service career path is a zero-sum game. Anyone who gets a promotion means someone did not get a promotion. So, there is an inherent stress in the system as people compete with each other for the promotion slots that exist.

Q: Why is that, up or out?

CLEVERLEY: Well, no. You send in the evaluations to a panel that has, say, a hundred promotions to grant this year. So, they rank order the candidates and give the top one hundred of them a promotion. But let's say you have two hundred who achieved enough to merit promotion. Every one of the one hundred promotions was one the other hundred did not get. My promotion is the promotion my colleague did not get. And most officers are at least some of the time living on the margin of the formalized success or failure a promotion means. So, there's a tension built into the system. I think, if you're a sensitive manager or supervisor, you never forget that. This is the environment we all work in. And you don't want to destroy someone's career unnecessarily. One result of this is the inflation that goes into evaluation descriptions. You definitely don't want to say something that will kill someone's career down the road a year or two if they don't deserve that. Anyway, these are all elements in our system that aggravate the process of managing.

Q: Was this ever discussed? Or did you ever have any exposure to what you've just said prior to going to Helsinki?

CLEVERLEY: Of course, I knew the system. But we never discussed it anywhere before I got to Helsinki on this tour. Several years later, when I was on my way to an assignment in Rome, I took a required diversity class. We talked about many of these issues, and it was a good class. But I wished I had had it before my first DCM job. By the time I took it, I might have taught the class with examples for most of the issues they raised. But I learned by the seat of my pants. For example, we had an officer who was visually impaired. She was assigned to supervise a secure warehouse.

Q: How can she do her job?

CLEVERLEY: Well, that was the first question the management officer asked. He was really uptight about it, because ultimately, it came under his watch. He was down on the assignment from the beginning and tried to get it undone. But personnel was not willing to change the assignment, and she ended up coming to post.

Q: Sheez.

CLEVERLEY: After several months at post, the management officer came to me to tell me that she was not performing satisfactorily. As DCM, you have to find a keen balance in a situation like this one. Was he saying this because he was angry that she got the job in the first place? Was he against her because she was visually impaired? Or was she really not doing her job very well? The management officer said he was going to write her a negative evaluation. I knew the evaluation might have repercussions and probably result in a grievance. I wasn't sure the Department would lend any support to a negative evaluation. And I knew I couldn't tell the rating officer what to write or not write as long as it was done within the precepts.

The only solution, I decided, was to get another point of observation, and to keep a detailed file of all this. So, I asked her to take on a special assignment for me. I wanted to see how she did it. It was a job I had done as a young officer, and I was certain she could do as a visually impaired officer. If she had any difficulty, I would give her assistance, I promised. I told her we needed to update the duty officer book, and she would be responsible. You know, it's a bit of work, but was something that should have been doable.

Q: Update the duty officer book?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, every post then had a book called the duty officer book that outlined the procedures a duty officer needed to follow when issues arose, especially at night or during the weekend outside normal embassy hours. It wasn't really a long book but had to be accurate and up to date.

Q: But she was visually impaired. So, did she have a reader? Or how did that work?

CLEVERLEY: She had an embassy-paid reader for use with her work. For example, she had to ask the consular officer to verify off hours routines. The same was true with other sections. That could be done in an office discussion, or preferably in writing.

Q: Yeah, so it was something that she could do.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, but she just put it off, and put it off, and never did it. A couple of times I asked her to my office to discuss the project and any problems she was having with it. But she never finished the assignment. So, my conclusion was that she wasn't effective, as her supervisor claimed. A few years later when she grieved the management officer's evaluation, I had my own observations and a detailed file about her performance to use in my response to the grievance board.

These types of things come to you as a DCM and no one else—maybe only a few knows about it. It can be quite time-consuming and sometimes heart-wrenching. It has to do with people's lives and careers.

Q: Yeah, no, and the amount of time for this one individual when you were a one-man band manager for a hundred and fifty-five. Well, oversight of their supervisors, at least.

CLEVERLEY: During this tour as DCM, I felt my time had to be spent mainly in the office. I didn't feel as much that way during my subsequent assignments, as we will discuss another time.

Q: Yeah, yeah. What was the role of the DCM? One—did you have a lot of high-level visits? And two—what was your role? And how did that impact on your every day? How did you balance the everyday versus the VIP [very important person] visit? For example, I can imagine, when Hillary came, you'd get the advance team, you get the entourage, you get the events as scheduled and the unexpected and you get the departure. Anyone who has been in your position knows how just handling that—forget everything else, you know, consumes your life for a couple of weeks. Help the reader, help somebody else in another time understand in specifics, how did you manage? How many visits? What did they entail? And how did you play your role in them?

The Clinton-Yeltsin 1997 Summit

CLEVERLEY: The short answer is you take one hat off and you put another on very quickly as a DCM. One day you are trying to keep an officer safe from his spouse, and the next you are hob-knobbing with Lords of the Universe. During my time in Helsinki, we hosted several big visits that even after the huge Al Gore mega-visits in South Africa, were very large and taxing. The Clinton-Yeltsin summit in March of 1997 was one of them. This was part of our effort to establish a rapprochement between Russia, United States, and NATO in the early post-Soviet era. I was the embassy control officer.

Q: What does that mean?

CLEVERLEY: That meant I was to ensure that anything the advance team or the visit itself needed—from security to hotels to meeting rooms to transportation to equipment to booze—was available and delivered, when needed. It was also to make sure that we were on top of everything going on, so that we could better anticipate problems before they arose.

Q: Yeah, what was the advance team? You drop all this off as though everybody knows. And they don't.

CLEVERLEY: When you have a presidential visit or even a secretarial visit, the visit of the secretary of state, an advance team and sometimes a pre-advance team arrive from Washington ahead of time to start putting together the program and logistical support. It is often a lot of work just to host the advance team that may consist of ten to forty people.

Q: And how soon in advance of the visit did they arrive?

CLEVERLEY: It depends on the nature of the visit, especially how much fore-warning people have of the principal's visit. In this case, I suppose we had about six weeks to prepare, and the advance came maybe three and a half weeks ahead of the visit.

Q: Yeah. What did the embassy have to do for them? And what did you have to do for them as the control officer for the embassy?

CLEVERLEY: Hotel reservations are first on the list. When they arrive, you meet with them to learn about the visit and what type of support they need. And then you start a process to ensure everything is going to be there when they need it. This entails assigning embassy control officers for each issue, or set of issues, such as meetings, meeting rooms, transportation and motorcades, etc. The embassy control officers are usually the liaisons between the U.S. side and the host, in this case, the Government of Finland, and sometimes with the opposing side in the talks, in this case, the Russian embassy. For the most part, however, we let the Finns work as the go-betweens with the two sides.

Ideally, you should develop a rapport with the advance team, so everyone feels comfortable together. That is not always easy. I found the White House advance team often acted with a certain amount of prejudice against embassy staff, giving the impression embassy people were not as knowledgeable or empowered as those who worked in the White House. They also were used to an environment where whatever the President wanted trumped other considerations, and they had difficulty understanding why this was not also the case in a foreign setting. What worked in Washington, did not necessarily go over well in Helsinki. The embassy had to make sure the puzzle pieces fit together with each other, and this was not always a popular job. There was sometimes a little tension in the relationship. But the idea is to make everything work as smoothly as possible. When the actual visit begins with the arrival of the American principals, the advance team's job is done, but many of them melt into the visitors' staffs.

When the advance team arrived, we learned that in addition to President Bill Clinton, we would also have at the Helsinki Clinton-Yeltsin summit Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbot, Secretary of Treasury Larry Summers, and a couple of other high-level VIPs that, I can't recall, may have included the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We needed control officers for each of them to make sure their programs were put together as they desired. So, we started going through the embassy staff to assign responsibilities. Each venue also had a control officer to ensure the venue was what people in the White House expected when they arrived for the meeting. You may not always be able to meet all the expectations the President's people have, but you want to make sure that they are assured that what can be done is sufficient.

Not unsurprisingly, there are often certain expectations that the ambassador has that are not realistic. The White House, or principal, may not see things exactly the same way as the ambassador. So, you manage that issue as well. I always assigned a control officer just for the ambassador so that there was somebody paying attention and on top of those needs, and a control officer sometimes for the ambassador's spouse, as well.

In this case, the advance team was headed by a man named Mort Engelberg. Mort was kind of a second-string Hollywood producer who had somehow met the Clintons when Bill was running for president. The White House was impressed with the idea that as a

Hollywood producer, Mort would bring show and glitter. When Mort arrived, show and glitter were his marching orders.

It was difficult working with him because he and many of his people didn't know much about government. They didn't know anything about the issues the summit was to talk about. And they didn't care, really. Some of them were like twenty-year-old, just-out-of-college types doing this for free as volunteers. Since they were on the president's staff, everybody in the embassy had to listen to them. That created frustration, as you can imagine, because of their lack of experience or ability, or both. The need for the embassy to make sure that this visit and the meetings succeeded played sometimes against the novices in the support party. It required finesse and diplomacy. Nobody wanted nasty letters coming back to the ambassador when the visit was over.

Q: Was the secret service part of the pre-advance?

CLEVERLEY: The Secret Service was part of the visit from beginning to end. They are entrusted with the president's life, and you support them. I found then and at other times that the Secret Service, more than anyone, understood the value of close embassy and visit coordination. They realized that often when things flare up, there might be a security misfire that causes it, and in my first meeting with them, we established an open, clear channel of cooperation to deal with any eventuality. One day, one of the Secret Service officers had somehow insulted the ambassador's wife. The secret service rep agreed with me that the matter needed quick attention. The Secret Service group smoothly patched things up all around.

Q: They tend to be career. They've done it before.

CLEVERLEY: As part of the advance process, members of both teams visited different venues to check them out. One day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handed out Nokia phones to members of both Russian and American staffs to use in support of the summit. Nokia used to have a characteristic tone, and all the phones were set with the same ringing tone. While all of us were touring one venue, a call on someone's phone chimed. No one immediately knew whose phone it was and quickly all hundred or so Russians and Americans were comically fumbling at the same time to pull out their phone.

The almost comical color of the event continued when the meetings began. Yeltsin was right on the edge of the transition between the Soviet Union and the new Russia. On his staff, he had people who wore western suits and haircuts, looking very modern. But he had other guys who still looked like they were in the Soviet Union, with strange haircuts and old suits that fit poorly. I guessed you could tell the persuasion of each by just looking at them. On our side, we had Hollywood glitter seekers and just graduated staffers rushing around. The event had amazing contrasts.

Mort Engelberg did bring a good idea for making the summit look glamorous on TV. He didn't want the meeting in a regular conference center, which he thought would look boring. So the Finns, anxious to be accommodating, started taking us to different places

that had a better feel. They weren't having much success, however, and finally the Finnish president offered his own residence. It was a beautifully modern residence on the sea that was exactly what Mort wanted. The summit took place in the residence of the Finnish president.

Q: Must have been kind of cool in the end for the Finns, no?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, but there weren't any large rooms, and you couldn't fit many people into a meeting, or actually into the residence, itself. Just a side-bar here to explain that the presidential delegation was about a thousand people, and that was about normal for such visits. Most of them were not at the conference site, but you can imagine the numbers actually present were still more than a few. A lot of the business was done in the residence's corridors or in the foyers, which for us control people was quite interesting, because we could watch.

Q: If you can't be in the room where it happens, be in the corridor where it happens. And people, a lot more of the world's diplomacy gets done in the corridors than people realize, sometimes.

CLEVERLEY: Once I was standing in a corridor next to Madeleine Albright when she was talking with Russian Foreign Minister Primakov [Yevgeny Primakov]. He had about three guys around him. She was a tough negotiator and floated an idea saying, "So, this is what I want to do." Primakov turned to his people and then replied, "No, we don't want to do that." She looked at him, turned on her heels, and spoke toughly over her shoulder, "Then we have no deal." Primakov was left there with his staff speaking in Russian. What they said I couldn't tell, but from the looks on their faces, it must have been something like, "What did we say? What did we do?"

Q: Don't mess with Madeleine.

CLEVERLEY: One of the fascinating things about this summit was to watch Bill Clinton. He had had an accident on a golf course, just before he left for the summit. His knee was in a splint, and he was in a wheelchair. When Air Force One arrived, they had to figure a way to get him off the plane. There wasn't an easy one, given the size of the plane and the configuration of the air terminal, so they had a crane take the President in his wheelchair off the plane onto the tarmac. That was the international TV image, probably not the one Mort would have wanted.

But Clinton was a remarkable negotiator. He preferred to negotiate one-on-one. The arrangement was Yeltsin would be in the room with just one person, presumably an interpreter, and Clinton would be there with his one person, and that was Strobe Talbott who was totally fluent in Russian.

So a small room worked for them, and the rest of us waited in the hallways. It was a difficult discussion because it centered on NATO expansion to the east, into the former Soviet Republics. This was not something the Russians were ready to accept, obviously.

But Clinton made enough progress and came away with an understanding supporting the idea. Clinton did it on his own. Strobe Talbott in the room, and there was no question about what had been said. Clinton had his own problems, of course, but at least he knew how to handle a situation like this one well.

Q: Because it's also so relevant in 2022, today as we speak, what was the deal involving NATO and expansion to the east?

CLEVERLEY: What came out of the summit was an agreement for what was called a "Founding Act." It wasn't signed there in Helsinki, but a few months later. Although Yeltsin and the Russians were very much against NATO expansion, they chose not to fight it, but rather to accept a process of Russian-NATO cooperation. It included, for example, having Russian representatives at NATO, actually based and staffed at SHAPE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Command Europe] headquarters in Belgium. So, it set in motion a set of agreements to allow our idea of the security architecture in Europe to go forward. Russia did not get exactly what it wanted, but it was a deal that they could live with for the time being. It was a very important summit in that regard. The Baltics may not have been able to join NATO if we hadn't made progress at that summit.

Q: Would you care to comment on that? Or make observations on that, in light of what Putin has done in Ukraine in the last four, three weeks?

CLEVERLEY: The Summit removed Russia from blocking the road to Baltic country membership in NATO. I guess my speculation is what Putin has done in Ukraine would not have taken place in Estonia, because Estonia is a NATO country, and it would be a lot riskier. Much easier but a lot riskier.

Q: So, the fact of this summit and the four people in the room who struck the deal, was a de facto coming to terms with a new order of things which as you said, wasn't totally satisfactory to Russia, because there would be expansion. But they also would have a role to play if they chose to join NATO. They would be at SHAPE. And that for that period of time, both countries were in agreement that perhaps the United States was a bit more satisfied than Russia. Is that a fair summing up of?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I'm sure that's the case. Of course, Yeltsin was probably satisfied enough. But bringing it up to our time, Putin has always considered that a huge mistake. The new relationship outlined in Helsinki was not acceptable to Putin, and that's one of the things he is trying to undo.

Q: Why do you think that is? How do you understand it, because tacitly or not, the Founding Act was leaving the door open for an East-West rapprochement ideally. It would be the Russians' choice, but ideally, the door was open. And it allowed for modernization on the part of everybody—modernizing, coming to terms with a new reality. We were no longer the United States and the Soviet Union. We were the United States, Russia and a larger Europe. How do you explain to yourself? How do you see what has happened?

CLEVERLEY: Of course, that's how we would look at it. And we would have been happy if this rapprochement had continued. But for Putin, the arrangement we tried to create fell well short of what he would have wanted, which was a reincarnation of the Soviet Union, or perhaps the old Russian Empire.

Q: Putin was in the game or not yet with Yeltsin?

CLEVERLEY: Not yet.

Q: He had not yet been picked up by Yeltsin.

CLEVERLEY: No, he was not part of this early process. So, as he looks at it today, the East-West rapprochement left Russia in an inferior position for what it was and what it wanted to be. It was not a rapprochement that was acceptable to Russia's long-term interests.

Q: And what is that long-term interest?

CLEVERLEY: I think the long-term interest is trying to assume the position of parity or equality as a superpower that it once had, in the immediate case by absorbing Ukraine, a source of great wealth, land, and population.

Q: And production.

CLEVERLEY: And production and location.

Q: And it is the Russian outlet to the sea.

CLEVERLEY: It is, yeah. There are a lot of things that Ukraine offers, but there are other former provinces, republics, which could add their own value in trying to reach this world where Putin believes Russia should live.

Chargé d'Affaires

Q: Yeah. A fascinating and timely digression. Let's go back to visits, to the summit, and everything else for which you were responsible and made up a part of this extraordinary first DCM ship?

CLEVERLEY: I seem to have dwelled a lot on this visit, and maybe it will be useful in the future. But I suspect presidential visits will be conducted in the same way for years to come. Focusing back on the DCM job in Helsinki, one of the main parts of this assignment was a long period of about a year, when I was *chargé d'affaires*, acting ambassador when we had no ambassador, or our ambassador was absent.

Q: Why?

CLEVERLEY: Derek Shearer left post in October of 1997 and Eric Edelman did not arrive until August of 1998, a period of about nine or ten months when we didn't have an ambassador. The Clinton administration was notorious for its slowness in filling slots when they were open.

Q: Why?

CLEVERLEY: I don't know the reasons for this, and perhaps no one knew then, either. Probably, the bureaucracy of it. Finland was only one of the very many posts that was left without an ambassador for an extended period.

Q: Was it congressional confirmations that caused the delays? Or was it White House personnel that caused the delays? Today, it is largely Ted Cruz.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, Ted Cruz was not a player then, nor was there exactly a Ted Cruz then. I think it was simply bureaucratic sluggishness in the White House in coming up with somebody and getting them through Congress. I don't recall that there was anyone on the docket to come to Finland for quite a while. And then, Derek Shearer traveled outside of Finland a lot while he was ambassador. There were probably two or three months that I served as *chargé*, even when he was still ambassador. So, what it meant was over the period of three years, I spent about one year as *chargé d'affaires*.

Q: Yeah. Do other countries have the same experience?

CLEVERLEY: No, not in my experience.

Q: Why?

CLEVERLEY: Well, perhaps because they have a more effective mechanism for nominating and putting into place ambassadors. Take Finland as an example, probably all but one or two of Finnish ambassadors in the world are career people. So, it is just a matter of moving up the career ladder, getting nominated, and coming into the job. Whereas among American ambassadors to western European countries, there are times when you may only have one or two career ambassadors. The rest are political appointees. And I can only assume that in the process of deciding which person is going to get a nomination from the White House there's a lot of political jockeying going on within the party and among the people who got the President elected in the first place.

Q: Is money often a determining factor? Or are there other factors? In other words, donors.

CLEVERLEY: Donors, yeah. So many of our political ambassadors are donors. But in this case, Eric Edelman was not. They had decided not to go with a political appointment but a career officer.

Q: How did that happen? Was it purely because he was COS [chief of staff] for Strobe?

CLEVERLEY: I think it probably helped a lot that he knew Strobe, because the deputy secretary is close to the appointment process. For Eric, as a first term ambassador, this was a good posting. He was my age. Finland was kind of a plum, a place that was interesting, and a great country to live in.

Q: And it had enormous political influence because of the proximity and the traditional role of a meeting place between East and West.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, that's right. So, for about a year more or less, I ran the embassy, over my three-year assignment.

Q: So, you were ambassador anyway. How did that stack up? How does that stack up?

CLEVERLEY: I was wearing two hats. The post wasn't big enough that I could easily have an acting DCM. If I had chosen one of the section chiefs, it would have left their section weak. So, I chose to not nominate an acting DCM.

Q: So, you did two jobs at once.

CLEVERLEY: Among other things, it meant taking on more of a representational role. We kept both the ambassador's and DCM's residences with a full schedule. One day, we might have lunch in the ambassador's residence and a dinner at the DCM residence. I didn't want to lay off the residence employees, especially when I didn't know in the beginning how long it would be before we had a new ambassador. I tried to keep up our outreach, the people-to-people aspect of the job through representation. We did all kinds of events, everything from Halloween and Valentine's parties to luncheons for senior American leaders who were in Helsinki for one reason or another.

Q: Did that fall to Seija or did you have a social secretary who did it?

CLEVERLEY: Well, we had a protocol secretary then, and we had a residence chief of staff at the ambassador's residence, too. But Seija did the lion's share of the management. She was happy to help, and she was Finnish. She knew people, they knew her, and she knew how to deal with the Finns. So, it worked out fine and wasn't the hardest part for me. Seija energetically administered our residence and many functions in this DCM job as well as the following ones. Her Karelian heritage greatly valued friends, parties, and entertainment. I found representation in our home an important part of developing contacts to meet the job's substantive requirements. She was a natural and played an invaluable leading role in this, and in retrospect, we always refer to "our" career, not "my" career. When we meet friends and contacts, even now decades later, at one point or another the conversation goes back to a party they attended in our home.

The difficult part for me was trying to manage two jobs at the same time. It seemed to me from that experience that the job of the DCM—the DCM aspect of the job—was immensely more difficult than the ambassador’s.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Did you get extra pay?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I did. I got chief of mission pay. Not very much. A little.

Q: It wasn't twice your other salary.

CLEVERLEY: I wish. But no, it was only a little. I also tried to travel extensively, as much as I could to keep the embassy’s flag flying. That was something that many ambassadors in the past did quite successfully, to get out of Helsinki into other parts of the country. Finland is geographically large, and many of the key cities are actually quite small by American standards—50,000, 60,000, 80,000 inhabitants. So, getting a visit from the American chief of mission was often a big deal to them, and it paid off.

Q: Where did you go? From where to where? You went north of Rovaniemi?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I didn't go to Rovaniemi, but just south of Rovaniemi on the Baltic was a provincial capital, Oulu, where the Finnish American Society had organized the annual America Days celebration. It also happened to be my fiftieth birthday. I really did not want to have a birthday event even though in Finland, fiftieth and sixtieth birthdays are big deals.

Q: Big deals, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: So, I decided to take advantage of America Days to get out of Helsinki. After Oulu we planned to travel to Eastern Finland to visit a friend of ours, Father Rauno, who was the Orthodox vicar in *Ilomantsi*, a large Orthodox village on the Russian border. I thought that was about as far away as I could get from Helsinki on my birthday. But when I got to Oulu, the headline in the newspaper was, “American *chargé* arrives on his fiftieth birthday.” So, it all began with lots of birthday wishes.

Q: That's sweet. That's very, very Finnish.

CLEVERLEY: I was hoping that in *Ilomantsi* everything would wind down. I explained this to Father Rauno when we got there. He answered with a proposal. “If you really want to get away from things, I've told the Finnish border guard that the American *chargé* was coming to visit. And they invited you to join a patrol along the Russian border.” It would be overnight. I thought it was perfect. There were few places in Western Europe more isolated than that.

Early the next morning, we got into a speedboat and sped across the lakes to the border guard rendezvous points while Seija stayed in *Ilomantsi* with Father Rauno’s wife, Anneli. Father Rauno and I hiked along the border with a team of about ten Finnish

border guards. The commander was a captain. Perhaps, the most important member of the team was the sniffer dog, a German Shepherd. We followed a path on the Finnish side of the border. There was a fence about fifty feet away, and on the other side of the fence, another path ran on the Russian side. In poverty-stricken Russia during those days, the Russian side was run down, and their look-out towers were mostly unoccupied.

The Finnish dog sniffed continually all along the way. All of a sudden, it started making different types of motions. The captain said, “Well, he has found something. A bear crossed the border from the Finnish to the Russian side yesterday.” He added, “Don’t worry, though. As soon as the bear finds where he went, he will be back.”

Q: Is that by chance the border crossing for Nikel’? Do you know?

CLEVERLEY: No, this was farther south.

Q: Farther south, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: It really was, perhaps, some of Europe's most dense wilderness.

Q: Yeah, yeah. No, I was the first American to cross over, and I've never remembered or learned the name of the Finnish town or crossing point. But it was a border crossing that you took in order to get to Nikel’. This would have been ‘94 or ‘95. It was part of an Arctic Council, one of the earliest meetings. It was in Rovaniemi, but they took us to the border. It was a small group, not everybody went but I was in it. And somehow rather, the word had gotten because when I arrived, they presented me with a huge bouquet. And I was told that I was the first American to cross over the border at that point.

CLEVERLEY: Wow.

Q: And then we went on and had lunch—because we were concerned about, this was an environmental thing, which was the main modus of early Arctic Council—toxic dumps and you know, the fouling because of the nickel production. It was quite an experience, but I've never been able to remember how, somebody brought us there and all of a sudden, there was this one little sort of guard stand outside of Buckingham Palace, not much bigger than that, and a couple of border guards. But somehow, they got the word and there was a bouquet for the American because the American was coming, and this was the first time an American had crossed over there since the fall of the curtain.

CLEVERLEY: It was a fascinating experience.

Q: It was what you were describing. It all of a sudden brought back this flood of memory.

CLEVERLEY: It was an unforgettable experience. We spent the night camping out. The guards threw out a net that brought back kilos of vendace, a little small fish that we smoked there over the campfire. As we sat around the bonfire enjoying our delicacy, the captain caught everyone’s attention and said in the middle of it all, “Happy Birthday!”

Q: Yeah. Tell us about the patriarch, in your relationship with the patriarch. Not everybody is best friends with the patriarch.

CLEVERLEY: Well, he wasn't the patriarch. He was a vicar. Shortly after I arrived for my assignment in Helsinki, I was curious about what was happening in Finland's thinking about Karelia, an area that was broken into two parts. East Karelia was on the Soviet side of the pre-World War II border. Much, but not all of the remainder of Karelia had been on the Finnish side and ceded to the Soviet Union as part of the peace agreement at the end of the war. Both sides had been populated by ethnic Finns. One day I was talking to one of the Finnish president's advisors about how Finland related to Karelia, and whether there was any desire to get those lands back now that the USSR was gone. My friend told me to contact Father Rauno Pietarinen, the vicar at the Orthodox parish in Iломantsi, because he knew as much about this as anybody.

So, I contacted Father Rauno, and we went to visit him on an earlier trip to Iломantsi. Father Rauno was young, charismatic, and very active. He was well connected politically, a personal friend of the Prime Minister. His parish in northern Karelia, right on the Russian border, was probably the largest Orthodox congregation in Finland. Many of his flock had fled the Russians at the end of World War II to set up homes there. They had left houses, property, farms, and their cemeteries and memories on the other side of the border in the last days of the conflict. Father Rauno would take groups of people across to Russia to visit their locations. Since my wife is a Karelian, she hit it off immediately with Father Rauno and his wife, Anneli. That's the story of how we got acquainted. We remained friends and still are.

The Importance of Relationships

Q: Yeah, yeah. The importance of relationships.

CLEVERLEY: The importance of relationships really can't be overestimated.

Q: Why? Why?

CLEVERLEY: I think the relationships make it possible to experience things in a foreign country you will never be able to experience, to get the message that you might not otherwise ever hear, to send a message that without relationships you may never have a chance to deliver, to visit places you may never have a chance to see, to really get the full cultural and professional experience from your Foreign Service career.

I know I have gone on a lot about many things related to this assignment, and I just have a couple of things that I would still say and then we might move on to my next incarnation. First, I'd like to say a couple of words about family experiences, and then give an evaluation of the assignment like we did with South Africa.

Finnish Family Roots

Q: I think that's perfect. We've got about fifteen minutes. Do you want to do it now or start the next session?

CLEVERLEY: Why don't I just say, one of the personal things that we wanted to do in Finland was to see if we could visit the home that Seija's parents evacuated in Vyborg. *Viborg* is the Swedish name for the city. *Viipuri* is what Finns call it. With the Iron Curtain now down, it was easily possible to drive to Viipuri, which was only about a half an hour from the current border. Some people whom we had met had traveled to Viipuri and gave the name of a woman from Viipuri who spoke Finnish and Russian and served as an interpreter. We got in touch with her and arranged for her help. I applied for visas.

One day, Markus, one of our sons who was visiting us, Seija, and I drove to *Viipuri* to see if we could find the house. When we picked up our interpreter, we gave her the name of the street where Seija's parents and grandparents had lived. Seija was two years old when they left there during the war's last days. She didn't remember it.

Our interpreter knew exactly where the street was, in a Viipuri suburb on the road toward Helsinki. We parked our car and walked into the large yard to find a nice, beautiful garden where a man and his son were working. I could see from the concerned look on his face that he guessed who we were, Finns coming back to find their old home. Seija introduced herself and immediately added, "We haven't come back to get the old home. We just want to see it and say hello." After Seija's words, he relaxed and welcomed us. He said, "This is my son and my mother is in the house."

He was maybe in his mid-50s. The son was probably in his mid-20s. The mother was very old but came out to talk to us. She said that they were the first people to live in the house after my wife's parents and grandparents abandoned their home. Her family had come to live there within a month or so. They were from the Ukraine and had been shipped off to live on the Finnish border. When they left the Ukraine, they didn't know where they were going. When they got off the train, they were settled in Viipuri. The woman had lived there her whole life. She and her family were very pleasant, warm, and friendly to us.

Seija had heard a lot of stories over her lifetime that glorified their Viipuri home: everything was nicer there, the sun shined brighter, everyone was content. It was like the movie *Gone with the Wind*, that venerated the Old South. But the garden was lovely, and you could see how romantic the town and countryside once were. We had a wonderful chat, and when it was all over, they gave us a large basket full of berries from the garden, picked maybe from bushes Seija's parents once planted. They also sent us off with berries and mushrooms they had gathered from the forest.

It was like closure for Seija. It was something she had always heard so much about. Now it was a real place, not a story. Later, we made a second trip with one of our daughters and our other son. We brought gifts for them from Helsinki. Unfortunately, the old mother had passed away shortly after our first visit.

Q: Oh, how wonderful that you got to meet her.

CLEVERLEY: Some of our children re-occupied our empty nest while we lived in Helsinki. Kristiina, one of our daughters, had just got married and the young couple came to live with us for six months. She spoke Finnish and worked in the consular section. Our son, Mika, had graduated from college and was thinking through what to do next. We suggested he apply to the Helsinki School of Economics. He was accepted, came to live with us for about two years, and completed an MBA in International Business. Towards the end of his studies, Mika passed the Foreign Service entrance exam and entered his A-100 training the same summer we departed post. His first assignment was to be in Tel Aviv and following that to Embassy Helsinki where he worked in the same job and office I did between 1979 and 1983. He used the same Finnish dictionary I purchased for the office twenty years earlier.

Q: Today is March 25, 2022. This is Stephanie Kinney, continuing oral history recording session number ten with Mike Cleverley. Mike, when we left off, you had described the somewhat emotional return to visit Seija's old home in Vyborg and that experience. And we were about to wrap up your tour in Finland. Any other thoughts, in sort of summing up that you would like to do before we move on to your next assignment?

Negotiating an End to the NATO Bombing in Serbia

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I was due to leave in the summer of 1999. I will add one issue that came up towards the end of my assignment, something I didn't talk about in the last session, the NATO bombing in Serbia. The NATO action that started in March of 1999 was part of the Kosovo War and aimed to stop the Serbian atrocities there.

Helsinki, of course, was a long way from Belgrade, but our embassy got involved when Finnish President Ahtisaari as a mediator started negotiating with Strobe Talbott, the Russians, Brussels, and Serbian President Milosevic to bring the bombing to a halt and stop the Serbian aggression.

Q: Could you remind people specifically what this was about?

CLEVERLEY: Specifically, in this case, the question was Kosovo, traditionally a part of Serbia but made up of Serbs and Albanians. It was a potential tinderbox from the very beginning of the conflicts following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Towards the end of this period, Kosovo was the site of a lot of atrocities. At this point, I think most Europeans had decided that it was time to step in to see if the region could be stabilized. When the president of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, was not amenable to stabilization, but instead continued exporting his ethnic nationalism particularly into Kosovo, NATO began bombing Serbian military targets to force him to back down. The Balkans had suffered gruesome conflicts for thousands of years, but what was new was

that it was televised into people's living rooms, and the tragedy seemed more visible and closer to home.

Talbott took the lead for our government in negotiating to cease the NATO action in Serbia after an end to Serbian atrocities in Kosovo. He was on the road continually over that three, four-month period, traveling between Moscow, Helsinki, and Brussels, and back. The Russians were involved because they had supported Serbia as a fellow Orthodox country, and Milosevic listened to them, something he didn't do to the Europeans or us.

Strobe Talbott was in Helsinki numerous times. Ahtisaari was experienced with peace negotiations through his work with the UN. Although the embassy was not involved directly in these negotiations, we were nevertheless engaged in a major way in facilitating them and in coordinating directly with President Ahtisaari's office. At one point in the spring of 1999, both Secretary Albright and Secretary of Defense William Cohen descended with large delegations on Helsinki to meet with Russian and Finnish counterparts. We had about twenty-four hours' notice of the secretaries' arrival with their parties. I actually heard about the meeting on Finnish TV before Albright's office acknowledged it would take place.

There were hundreds of people with each secretary. We reserved a hotel for each. The hotels kicked out their guests so that we had the facilities to ourselves. This was the meeting where we got a final blueprint to pacify Kosovo and to stop NATO military operations. It was an all-hands-on deck operation for our small embassy. I was in my office coordinating logistics for almost all of the 48 hours it took place. Eric Edelman was then ambassador but was on leave during the visit.

George Papandreou, who was Andreas Papandreou's son and then Greek foreign minister, came to Helsinki with a Greek plan for Kosovo during one of those Talbott visits. Strobe Talbott, who was fully engaged in the discussions, saw the Greek attempt to intervene as an unwelcome diversion and would not take his phone calls. Finally, in order to placate the Greeks, Talbott agreed to meet George Papandreou in the lobby of the InterContinental Hotel. In retrospect, it was useful he did, for Papandreou a few years later became Greece's prime minister. That was the first time I met Papandreou.

Q: What a very small world you lived in, and a very surprisingly interconnected, intersecting one in those years. Could you say a few words about, for people whom it might not be intuitive, about why Greece was taking the fight of Serbia?

CLEVERLEY: Greeks and Serbians are Orthodox and Greeks showed much support toward the fellow religionists.

Q: It's Greek Orthodox as opposed to Russian Orthodox, but they both come out of Byzantium and the Byzantine Empire.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. For Greeks, the Orthodox Church was more than just a church. For three or four hundred years, Turkey had tried to destroy Greek culture by not allowing the Greek language to be taught. They kidnapped Greek children to Constantinople to be educated as future leaders. The church kept their culture alive and was the place where they taught their children Greek and Hellenistic traditions, often secretly. For that reason, Orthodoxy was very closely defined as an element of Hellenism. In the Greek mind, if you are Greek, you are Orthodox. If you are Orthodox, you are Greek. And other Orthodox societies are close to Greek sympathies.

Q: And we are seeing that surface again today with Vladimir Putin and his excuses for, among many others, its activity in aggressing Ukraine, as we speak.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. Diplomacy in Europe is never simple. It is a very complex thing because of the many ethnic and historical backgrounds and traditions of its different peoples.

Q: Would you hazard to offer another example of what you have just described, in looking at Poland and the role of the church, and ultimately the Pope, in preserving and enabling Polish nationalism and identity and borders to come to the fore, in the post-Soviet period.

CLEVERLEY: Just one easy example. John Paul, before he became Pope, was very much involved in the liberation movement as the end of the Communist dictatorship in Poland drew near. The Many Poles identified him as integrating the church with liberation from the communists. When Pope John Paul died, we were living in Rome. Over a million Poles came there to pay homage. Many didn't even have places to stay and slept in the streets. I'm sure for many Poles, Catholicism was seen as a liberator. But this was perhaps even more so in Greece, simply because they couldn't have existed for so many centuries without the Orthodox church. I can talk about it later perhaps.

Q: Yeah, yeah, no, we definitely want to do that. It fits in here as an explanatory note because it would maybe not have been intuitive to people that Greece, that we look back to as the original source of democracy and the democratic model, ends up supporting Milošević and the Serbs.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. The NATO action in Serbia was extremely unpopular in Greece, for that reason.

Q: Yeah. What did you do, give people a sense of a historical moment like that? You said that the embassy and you weren't personally involved in the negotiations per se, but the embassy and you were involved in facilitating the negotiations. What does that mean?

CLEVERLEY: Just like for the Clinton-Yeltsin summit a couple years earlier, it meant acquiring lodging, reserving hotels, arranging complicated motor pool routines, getting embassy officers acquainted with the venues, making sure the delegations were equipped with everything they needed, all with hardly any notice. Ours was a small embassy with

only three or four cars. And all of a sudden, we had several principals who needed to be able to move when they needed to move. We made sure that the meeting rooms were proper. The meetings went very late at night, eleven o'clock. At ten o'clock one evening I got a call in my office from the site control officer saying they needed a color fax immediately. And we had to come up with one. That doesn't sound like such a big deal today, but in 1999 it was.

Q: Was there one in the embassy?

CLEVERLEY: No, we didn't have one. But we ended up finding one. The management officer did it within an hour. So, those times—

Q: And why did they need a color fax? Why wouldn't a black and white one do?

CLEVERLEY: They were doing maps. They wanted to put colors on the maps. Sometimes delegation staffs come up with outrageous demands, but, you know, this was a time we were totally sympathetic. Sometimes, there's a lot of nonsense that goes on with such visits. With this visit there was no nonsense. The talks were really very substantive, very pointed and meaningful. People were dying. There was a window, and we felt like we were all trying to take advantage of it. We were all enthusiastic, but dead tired enthusiastic.

Embassy Support for Large Delegations

Q: What did the DCM, as opposed to tasking the admin officer to find a color fax, actually do in a situation like that? Did you stay in one place so that everybody always knew where you were and how to contact you? Or did you move around? Did you jump in yourself when there was nobody else to do whatever needed to be done? What things needed to be done? Give us some feel and operational reality because people rarely understand what we facilitated means.

CLEVERLEY: Well, there were tons of chiefs involved in the meetings. And our site and control officers didn't need someone looking over the shoulders. But they did need someone to call for back-up or advice when something unexpected arose. I decided that I could probably be more helpful if I were centrally located. I would be in one place with two mobiles and a fixed phone where everyone knew where to find me. These were complex negotiations, where so many distractions and unexpected things could go on, so I was there in my office to oversee things that you can't handle on the site. And there was a continual flow.

Q: Now, what was the site officer? What do you mean? And what was a control officer?

CLEVERLEY: So, a control officer for Madeleine Albright, for example, was someone who worked with her staff, on behalf of the embassy, to make sure she had everything. We needed to make sure she knew what was happening with other elements of the visit and knew where she needed to be and when. When there are two different delegations,

such as DOD and State in this one, it is easy for communications between them to drop or get confused on one issue or another. The embassy should ideally be a central switchboard. We needed to be sure that any messages for her actually got through to her or the relevant staff person. Site officers were stationed at the various venues to keep track of needs associated with the discussions. In this case, when the need for a color fax quickly arose, the staff turned to the embassy site officer to find one. He called me, and I got our management officer on the case without any delay. The embassy made sure that a conduit of information was flowing between all the moving parts.

When Albright departed, I went out to the airport, shook her hand, and she left. When she arrived, I did the same thing. I was the senior embassy person.

Q: You were the chargé d'affaires. You were the substitute ambassador.

CLEVERLEY: Even though he was in the country.

Q: Which was unusual, but that indicated the amount of trust he had in you, presumably.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, he did.

Q: And very often, although in the old days, certain types of officers dismissed that and marked it off as admin, it was as diplomatic because almost every single one of those small items end up in one way or another having to be negotiated, as well. So, they are very much a part of diplomacy. It's not just the final signature on the document and the celebratory rituals that people see in public that constitute diplomatic service. So, I think your nitty gritty description is very important in that regard, and something that, it would be wonderful if more people could understand.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, it is. If you have never done something like this, you don't know exactly how it happens. Facilitation is extremely detailed if you want to succeed. How devastating it is if one little thing goes wrong, and risks that the whole thing collapses.

Q: Collapses, absolutely. Was this the biggest event that you ever managed, or were there even bigger ones later on?

CLEVERLEY: One thing that made this visit difficult was that we had only a twenty-four-hour notice.

Q: Were you ever in your dreams, when you came into diplomatic service, imagined that event management—which today is a separate, even certified, trained-for profession, particularly in conjunction with fundraising—that you would spend so much of your days as a DCM, essentially, as an event manager? Do they train you at FSI [Foreign Service Institute] for it?

CLEVERLEY: No, there was nothing. Well, you get a lot of on-the-job training over the years when you get visitors, a visit of a single person or a War College group or something like this. So you get used to doing visit routines.

Everything is magnified greatly if you have a presidential visit. It was very interesting in London when President Reagan came through. Nobody I knew was a control officer or involved with it at all. The embassy was so large and had done this type of thing so much they had everything pre-planned: push the button and everything started in motion. In an embassy like Helsinki with fifty-five Americans, it's another thing.

Q: And twenty-four-hour notice for two different principals, each in a separate hotel with his or her own entourage of fifty to a hundred people.

CLEVERLEY: Exactly. All hands on deck.

Q: Can you give us some examples from your own experience? For example, such as, what is something that goes wrong? Besides IT [information technology], which always goes wrong?

CLEVERLEY: Well, once I was control officer for Paul Volcker, who was then chairman of the Federal Reserve, in Helsinki on my first tour. I can't recall what the context was, but the secretary of treasury was there too.

When Volcker arrived, I met him at the airport and gave him a program, "Here's your schedule, sir." And he said, "I don't need this. I'm the Federal Reserve and you are the State Department, so, just do not bother me." I answered, "That's fine, but I'm here if you need me." He told the driver to start driving, but then realized he didn't know where he was going. And so, there I was. I got in the car and we left. Nothing went wrong, but it would have gone wrong if I hadn't been there.

Q: Yeah. If you hadn't been there, he would have been left alone and clueless, notwithstanding "I don't need this."

CLEVERLEY: He didn't want to know, but then he didn't know and somebody had to be there to help him.

Q: Yeah, yeah. That is a quintessential, exquisite example of the daily life of the control officer.

CLEVERLEY: All's well that ends well, and the bombing ended in June. We had a chance to be a little bit of a big fly on the wall watching something interesting happening.

Q: Forgive me, but did you take away any lessons from that particularly enormous, historically significant event? Well, other than be prepared and as imaginative as possible?

CLEVERLEY: Be prepared. In any complicated event, choosing control officers is very, very important. You need to choose someone you can totally rely on because if one link in the chain is a little bit faulty, you risk big problems.

Q: Yeah. Is failure ever an option?

CLEVERLEY: No, failure is never an option. And quite often, the State Department in these events will get blamed for any failures, even when it isn't the embassy's fault. It's one of those things that if it goes well, often they don't say anything, and if it goes poorly, it is your fault. We all know cases like that.

Q: Yeah. Any other lessons? This is very important for the next generation because they're not well trained. Their experiences are not systematic, it's more random than yours was. You had an unusual straight-line career with good people all the way.

CLEVERLEY: Well, one thing that I always found essential was to keep the master schedule myself. I wouldn't give it to my office assistants to type, I kept on my computer and entered the events myself. As I put the things in, I found I memorized the latest edition, because things always change, sometimes hour-by-hour. But if you are doing it yourself, you know the latest.

For big visits, I would have two schedules, one with the events and venues, and another logistical schedule that had the events plus every movement, the time things are going to happen, and who is going to be there. In every detail, I knew the event, as it began, took place, and ended.

Q: Had they had time to do the White House handbook for this event, or was it so fast that there wasn't one, which made it even more demanding and difficult? And explain what a White House handbook is? What it looks like?

CLEVERLEY: Well, the White House handbook is a binder, and it has a lot of information for very senior visitors.

Q: Yeah. And what is the unit of time they used?

CLEVERLEY: I can't recall, is it minute by minute?

Q: It is literally minute by minute.

CLEVERLEY: But I would keep something like that, pretty much on my own.

Q: Yeah. Did anybody ever tell you part of being a diplomat was having an amazingly quick retentive memory and processing six things at once?

CLEVERLEY: Nobody told me, but I learned.

Q: How did you learn it? Why did you learn it?

CLEVERLEY: Through doing and the fear of failing?

Q: Failure is not an option in any principal visit. Have you ever been associated with a failed visit?

CLEVERLEY: No, I don't think I ever was. I was associated with visits that I thought failed but it wasn't for logistical or planning failures.

Q: Yes, yes. But had it failed? Not on your watch, it had been a grand success. One of the inside ironies of diplomacy and diplomatic service.

CLEVERLEY: My wife will tell you that I'm not very good at calendars. So, I had to do the calendar myself and have them in my mind. Any good, really exceptional control officer I ever knew had the schedule memorized.

Q: Literally minute by minute.

CLEVERLEY: In that way. When somebody asks what is supposed to happen now, you have the answer. You know. You don't say, "Oh, just wait, I'll go look." Sometimes you don't have time to look. It sounds strange, but five minutes can be a long time if you've got the secretary of state waiting.

Q: Yeah, it can be very uncomfortable.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. Those are some lessons, yeah.

Q: Every door has to open. And sometimes they're locked, and no one knows where the key is, and the principal is approaching from one direction. And pandemonium is going on behind the door trying to find the key, and in the last thirty seconds somehow or other, it is located but it is very often just that tight.

From Pretoria

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. It really is. So, my next assignment, how did that start to develop? In the fall of 1998, I was promoted to minister counselor. I mentioned earlier that the OC time in grade was seven years before forced retirement. Promotions finally had started to appear again. The promotion made it possible for me to really get on with my next assignment. I wanted to do another DCM job. There were two openings that had caught my eye. One was in Athens. And the other was in Rome. I especially wanted Athens.

Q: You had been there.

CLEVERLEY: I had a lot of friends there and knew the issues.

Q: Yeah, you spoke Greek.

CLEVERLEY: I spoke Greek.

Q: Did you speak Italian at that point?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I had spoken Italian once, but at that point, it was kind of secluded up there in the gray matter. It was always there. It didn't disappear, but access disappears if you don't use it. There was a political appointee in Rome, a former congressman who didn't know how to choose a DCM and made the bidding process rather miserable. His outgoing DCM, Jim Cunningham, was trying to shepherd the process. But the ambassador expected me to keep coming to Rome at my own expense to interview.

Q: Yes, that is something that people don't tell you about.

CLEVERLEY: So, I did it once, and he was totally non-committal. When I got back to post, he asked if I would come again. I answered that I'm available for the position but would not travel there again. I started concentrating on Athens.

Q: Would you feel comfortable letting us know who it was? Because it is public knowledge if you figure it out.

CLEVERLEY: It was Thomas Foglietta, a former congressman. He had brought his own staffer who seemed to run the front office, so I'm sure being the DCM would have been awkward. It seemed the staffer had some influence over the ambassador. I didn't feel that bad about not getting that job.

I was interested in Athens. Nick Burns [R. Nicholas Burns] was the ambassador in Athens at that time. Nick had someone else he wanted for the DCM job. But she was not at grade, too junior for it. Nick appealed to the foreign service director general to get an exception for his candidate. He told me that if the director general didn't allow her to have the job, he would give it to me.

In the meantime, Tony Wayne [Earl Anthony Wayne], who was the principal DAS [deputy assistant secretary] in the EUR [Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs] called me to offer one of two office directorships in EUR: ERA which handled regional affairs and the European Union, and NE, northern Europe, which dealt mainly with the UK. I hadn't bid on either of them, but they both appealed to me, and I was grateful for the offer. I told him about Athens, and we reached an agreement that if Athens came through, I would go there. If it didn't, I would take the ERA directorship. I think I might have even been close to being formally assigned the position. Everybody thought I was its future office director. One evening, the director general called me while I was in Helsinki to tell that he was giving me the DCM position in Athens if I wanted it. He had turned down Burns' appeal.

So, the next job was to be the DCM in Athens. It was language designated. And there was a year's interim from the time I left Helsinki to when I got to Athens. So, the discussion was about what I was going to do during that interim. I wanted to refresh my Greek through an intensive course that aimed to bring someone to a 4-4 level in Greek. When my final assignment was made, it put me into this Greek study. I was set to leave Helsinki in late June or early July of 1999, enter language school in late August, and leave for Athens in the summer of 2000.

Southeast Europe Stability Pact Office, Washington, D.C. Aug. 1999-Dec. 2000

Q: But your bio says that in '99, you were the deputy office director for the EUR Stability Pact. How does that fit into the chronology you just provided?

CLEVERLEY: Tony Wayne called me again while I was on home leave in the States in the summer of 1999. He badly needed someone to be the deputy director of a new office in the European Bureau. The director of the office was someone they were bringing from outside the State Department, Dan Hamilton. He was an academic and had no experience working in the State Department. Tony wanted to let Dan get on with the substance of the issues, while running the office was done by a senior foreign service officer.

Q: Was that Dan's first posting or first position in State?

CLEVERLEY: As far as I know, it was his first position and—

Q: I think he went up to policy planning at some point.

CLEVERLEY: He might have done so after that. I don't know. He was bright.

Q: He did policy planning and then transferred, because we crossed paths, similar, in S/P [Policy Planning Staff].

CLEVERLEY: As I remember, Dan had been involved with the German Marshall Plan before coming to State. He was an expert in Southeast Europe and was good for the Stability Pact job.

Q: He didn't know how to run operations.

CLEVERLEY: No, and he didn't want to.

Q: And didn't want to. That's a significant divide today even.

CLEVERLEY: He wanted to be able to get on to his issues and not worry about pencils and paper. So, I interrupted my home leave and drove directly back to Washington. This time my deal with Tony was that I would get to the job as fast as I could, but he would free me up at the end of the year, on December 31, to take some Greek before I left for

post. I reported to work in the later part of August and stayed through the end of the year, a little over four months.

Q: Forgive me, but how did the Stability Pact relate to the Dayton Accords? Was that before or after?

CLEVERLEY: It was much later because the negotiation for the Stability Pact was in June of 1999. The Stability Pact was conceived at the same time, they were talking and negotiating to stop bombing Serbia. Europe and the United States wanted something to stabilize southeastern Europe, particularly the former Yugoslav republics.

Q: And the Accords had been negotiated by Holbrooke when?

CLEVERLEY: A year or year and a half before that.

Q: Okay. Important context.

CLEVERLEY: Yes. And Dayton Accords were much narrower in scope. The Stability Pact was a major initiative promoted by the White House following a summit where Clinton had participated. The United States, European institutions, the European Union, and some international institutions—the IMF [International Monetary Fund], the World Bank—and Russia wanted to mobilize support for these countries to develop peacefully.

Q: Would you characterize this as winning the peace or winning the Accord as it were? Because the Accord doesn't—the Accord stops history, and you are talking about “but history keeps marching on.” What do you do with it? Yes, you've got a cessation of violence, but do you have stability? Is that a fair frame for why the Stability Pact was necessary and what you were subsequently trying to do after the Accords?

CLEVERLEY: In the Balkans, the atrocities were not what happened last week. They started in the Middle Ages.

Q: Thank you, yes.

CLEVERLEY: So, as you started looking at the problem, it just didn't seem to have a place in modern Europe. And yet there it was on the CNN [Cable News Network] every night. So, the idea was not winning the peace, but the idea was establishing prerequisites that peace could be built upon.

Q: Very good. Aha, elaborate on that just a little bit.

CLEVERLEY: The initiative was to open a very broad interaction among major donors and facilitators like the United States and European Union, major international institutions—the IMF and the World Bank—and neighborhood countries like Russia. We planned to start dialogues with dollars and euros behind them in three areas. The Pact had three tables. One was democratization, another one was reconstruction and development,

and the third one was security. And included in those three tables was a range of issues, everywhere from anti-corruption to free elections to attacking the narco trade and organized crime. With all of these different types of subjects, there were a lot of players. There were many different players in the United States government alone: USAID, the State Department, Treasury, and so on.

Q: And that was just the United States. That did not include any other European power.

CLEVERLEY: The European Union set up its own Stability Pact office and took the chair of the initiative with a man named Bodo Hombach. The Stability Pact agreement was reached in June of 1999 just as the NATO bombing stopped and carried a certain amount of urgency at senior levels to capture the momentum.

Initially, there was absolutely no bureaucratic mechanism for making that happen in the United States or anywhere else, either. The aim of the new State Department office was to put together a bureaucratic framework to coordinate American efforts and to jump start programs. There were really several thrusts. One was to coordinate and mold United States government activities into a common American approach. Another was to coordinate with the international institutions, especially those based in Washington. Still another was to coordinate policy with the European Union and the international Stability Pact Office, itself.

In more than one way, it was a cold startup, a combination of catching up and marking a path forward. Our office set-up was dreary. They found an office space for us that was barely habitable, off in a far corner of the State Department with hardly any heat. I thought I was going to freeze to death there. At first it didn't have human resources, nor many physical resources, either. I sometimes went out after hours as a scavenger looking for even such basic things as pens and paper that we couldn't get.

Q: Yeah, you hadn't been in the budget process the year before. Nobody had bothered to think that maybe, just maybe, there needed to be a separate fund for these kinds of things, because the world does not proceed on the basis of an annual State Department budget.

CLEVERLEY: That's right.

Q: Without imagination. Maybe without imagination, one might cynically also note. Forgive my editorial comment.

CLEVERLEY: Well, it is true. And there was no budget for us but lots of mandates.

Q: I had seventy-two in DRL [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor] at one point. Every single one was unfunded and yet we had to do it.

CLEVERLEY: We ended up getting some good officers, an Italian exchange diplomat, and most importantly, an office assistant to staff the office. I could have engaged more in

travel and policy formulation, but I thought the best thing I could do at this point was to be a facilitator so that the office could start producing.

Q: Yeah, yeah. All the words in the world don't mean if you don't have an operational delivery system. And you need to know how to do both.

CLEVERLEY: The most I would do on substance was to integrate the different proposals into cables. Regularly I would meet with other agencies. I was making sure everyone was learning their jobs, doing their jobs, and getting stuff to where it needed to be at the right time. Dan Hamilton captained the policy ship, as he was expected to do.

Q: Yeah, another major event management challenge.

CLEVERLEY: And after that, I went into language training and spent the next six months gaining some Greek language ability. I finished with a 3+,3+.

Q: Forgive me, before we move to Athens, because I can't help but be struck by the similarity with what you just described, and what we are looking at with the Ukraine war today, particularly, the three sections that you described as the sort of the pillars for the post-conflict moment—democracy, reconstruction & development and security. It strikes me that they may not be the same words, but the pillars are going to be inevitably needed once again, as soon as everybody figures out how to stop the killing in Ukraine.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, those are all issues we are likely to worry about for a long time. And a question will be who pays for it?

Q: Yeah. And how it is executed. The money only goes so far, you have to have it. That has to be raised but using it properly, and having an outcome and a product for your money is a whole other can of worms. As we learned in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Athens, Greece July 2000-June 2003

CLEVERLEY: Well, shall we go on to Athens?

Q: Your story.

CLEVERLEY: I arrived in Athens in the first days of July 2000. I have described earlier what Athens was like seven years before. I left in 1993. Many things had not changed. Politically though, there was a new prime minister from PASOK [Panhellenic Socialist Movement], a social democrat type of party. George Papandreou, whom I met in Helsinki, was the foreign minister.

Europe and Greece

Politically, the country was fully supportive of all EU [European Union] initiatives. They were among the first ones to sign up for the EMU [Economic and Monetary Union]. They

saw the European Union as a successor or buffer. Greece was on the eastern border of the European Union, and its long-term foe, Turkey, was on the other side. And so, they were intent to be more European, even though in their view, Europe is part of Greece rather than the other way around.

Q: Explain what you mean by that. Not that important, I suspect.

CLEVERLEY: Well, in their view, all of the good things in Europe like democratic process and values, human rights, philosophy, and even the Olympics came from the ancient Greeks.

Q: In the Greek view.

CLEVERLEY: Even though it was 2,000 years ago, the European intellectual framework had Greek origins. Even linguistically. One governor of the Bank of Greece once gave a speech in an international meeting, and every word he used in the speech that was in English had a Greek origin.

Q: On purpose, no doubt.

CLEVERLEY: Of course. To make a point. Economically, the country was thriving, but it was kind of a fool's paradise. Greece was probably the biggest recipient of the EU development funds. All of the same old problems that I had known in my previous assignment were still there—tax evasion, corruption, overwhelming fiscal deficits, mountains of debt and so on. It was a bomb ticking ready to go off. During those years, it did not explode, but anybody who was looking saw the danger.

Concern over 2004 Olympics Security

Security-wise, Athens was still a very dangerous place to work. When we were there on our first tour, Middle Eastern terrorist groups were active in Greece, although they tended to focus their activities outside the country. Our biggest threat then and during our second assignment was the domestic group “17 November.” But in addition to 17 November, there were other anarchists and crowds of demonstrations in front of the embassy. After one huge demonstration during the second tour, we even found a tomahawk that had been thrown at the embassy, and something like ninety windows were broken.

Q: Wow. A tomahawk as in cowboys and Indians or a tomahawk as in a weapon? A modern weapon?

CLEVERLEY: As in cowboys and Indians, but a real weapon. We did have an offset and they had to work hard to heave those stones to break windows. Because of the demonstrations, the bomb threats, and everything else, our Marine security guards were mobilized to all stations in what was called a “react” at least weekly. The group 17 November, a few weeks before we arrived, murdered the defense attaché from the British Embassy in his car, just a few blocks from where we lived.

One other thing on the horizon was the 2004 Olympics. Because of Greece's terrorist problems, we were extremely concerned about Olympic security. If you were Greek, of course, the Olympics had come home. We had to be careful how we voiced our security concerns because Greeks reacted poorly when Americans criticized their capacity to host the Olympics games.

Q: And it was the first in modern times.

CLEVERLEY: No, the first in modern times was in 1896.

Q: That was the first Olympics if I recall. Yeah, but it hadn't been back since then.

CLEVERLEY: No, it hadn't. Our biggest concern was security. Greece's security environment was officially rated at a critical threat level within the State Department.

Q: Did people remember Munich?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, of course, Munich was very much in mind, and we definitely did not want something happening where, say, a part of the American Olympic team was shot at. In addition, quite close to the embassy were Athens neighborhoods that were home to anarchists. The anarchists were violent and could mount demonstrations at a moment's notice, going through the town and destroying cars and shop windows.

So, Olympic security was something that we were thinking very seriously about. And we knew that the United States would not field an Olympics team to the Athens Olympics if we weren't satisfied with the security preparations.

Critical Threat Post, Personal Security, and Security Details

Q: How did your family feel about this? You had a job to do, and you could and had a practiced understanding and approach to a certain level of violence by now. How does a family—wife and children—even though they've been to Greece before, they love it, they have some comfort with the language and the people, did they react? Maybe it was not a big deal, it was just some more of some more. But help us understand the family dimension right here, just on this particular security issue.

CLEVERLEY: The good thing was that the family was fairly safe, because none of these terrorist groups had ever targeted dependents. They were after principals, people with a position or a name. So, it was custom-made terrorism. My family worried about me, of course. But as DCM I had a security detachment that was thorough and professional. I traveled everywhere in an armored car with a driver and a policeman with a submachine gun. Following my car was an armored suburban with about five policemen. There was also a motorcycle cop weaving around us and a pre-surveillance person at my destination checking out the place before we arrived.

The detail covered every movement I made. I was not allowed to drive, nor go out of the embassy on my own. I was not allowed to do anything on the weekends without my security detachment around me. The motorcade was about ten to twelve people, and I had two of them that alternated with each other. The embassy had mixed detachments: our own hired security people and Greek police. There were big programs to train these policemen there and in the United States. Around our house, we had three security guards twenty-four hours a day, and we weren't allowed to leave the yard without first getting my security detail. It was total coverage.

Q: Was there any difference between your detachment and that of the ambassador?

CLEVERLEY: It was exactly the same.

Q: Exactly the same, aha.

CLEVERLEY: And then there were a few agency chiefs who also had details.

Q: Yeah, but the mere existence of the detachment reassured the bad guys that they had a big fish.

CLEVERLEY: Well, it did, but it also meant they were up against a lot of trained professionals and fire power.

Q: Yeah, it was a bigger challenge.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. Once, after 9/11, the security officer told me they had discovered my name on an international terrorism hit list. He wanted to know if I wanted to be transferred out. I decided that with all of the security I had, I would just stay. Who knew how much to credit such a report, anyway?

Q: Yeah, yeah. They found my daughter's name on a [BR] list in Rome in the school bus from downtown to Marymount, and they were not a nice bunch, those Euro terrorists.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I remember from my time in Milan.

When I arrived, the mission was basically the same, with the exception that we had a very large and active FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] office. And of course, the FBI was greatly focused on terrorism. They also had a group in a separate building trying to identify and track terrorists.

Ambassadors Nick Burns and Tom Miller

Nick Burns was the ambassador. He was there for one year, and then was replaced by Tom Miller. Tom, I knew from my A-100 class. He had been ambassador in Bosnia and his next ambassadorship was Athens.

Q: Yeah. Is there anything to say about—you said, “Tom, whom I knew from A-100.” That was a long time ago, by the time you get to Athens. Is there anything to remark about A-100 cohorts? Had you all been in touch? Was it just, “Oh, I know you from the very beginning of my career, what's happened to you? Yeah. How about you?” Is there anything to describe there? As in, in terms of Foreign Service culture and the nature of diplomacy itself, so much a function of heavenly bodies randomly running into each other over a period of thirty years, both domestic and internationally?

CLEVERLEY: Well, it probably could be the case for some people. Certainly, my son, who's in the Foreign Service, has kept up more with his A-100 class. My time in the class was cut short. So I didn't get to know everyone as well.

Q: So, you didn't even have orientation. They just took you and brought you right to work.

CLEVERLEY: They put me in Italian language study after two and a half weeks, or so, of the A-100. I have one former colleague whom we saw over the years, Dave Wagner [David Wagner], whom I mentioned earlier. When I was in Helsinki the first time he was in Moscow, we went back and forth to visit a couple of times. He met his wife in my home in Helsinki, actually.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So, you and Tom “knew of each other,” probably more than “you knew each other” at that point. Would that be fair?

CLEVERLEY: That would be fair. This was Tom's third time in Greece and my second, although we never overlapped.

Both he and Nick Burns patterned the ambassador-DCM relationship on the classic CEO-COO model: the ambassador was the chief executive officer of the mission with the DCM as the chief operating officer whose job was to run everyday operations. It was a good model allowing the ambassador more time to deal with policy and outreach. I worked well with both ambassadors. Both had an open-door policy, and we were in close contact every day, throughout the day. I thought a big part of my job was to make sure the ambassador was apprised of what was happening in the mission. Among many other things, it kept the DCM from being such a lonely job. And I could get good feedback from the ambassador.

This was especially true with Tom Miller. He had been around the “Athens” block a number of times. Nick Burns had not served abroad very much. Tom had a brilliant on-the-ground instinct about the job and the Greeks. He led the embassy with intelligence, foresight, and common sense that the Greeks quickly respected. I took care of everyday management operations in the State offices, but also, had a lot of interaction with the other agencies.

The Athens Embassy 2000

Q: Talk a little bit about the country team in Athens in this period. And was there any notable contrast with when you had been there before?

CLEVERLEY: There was a big Office of Defense Cooperation [ODC] element headed by an Air Force colonel. On this tour I worked with them extensively because I chaired the American team that met every month or so with Greek counterparts to negotiate and discuss issues related to the American bases in Greece, principally the vast facilities in Souda Bay, Crete. And of course, we had a defense attaché's office, an FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] operation as well as DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] on the law enforcement side. The Departments of Commerce and Agriculture both had offices, as did the Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS], as it was called then. Our public affairs and management offices were managed by senior officers. Our consular, economic and political sections are headed by O1 officers.

Q: You had a station, I presume?

CLEVERLEY: A very large station. They of course were very interested in terrorism, counterterrorism and so on.

Q: Yeah. Was that a sub-section, a separate function? Or was that just one among many priority issues?

CLEVERLEY: Well, they of course have many priority issues that are wide ranging. But I would think counterterrorism was the number one priority.

Q: Had USIA been integrated into State by then?

CLEVERLEY: It had been integrated in the State by then and was called Public Affairs.

Q: This would have been in the late '90s, yes. The integration was just literally being executed back home and it was very, very difficult.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, the early 2000s. We also had an exceptionally large security operation that was run by an O1 officer. We had a lot of very experienced officers at the O1 and senior levels.

Q: How many people—and you had AID [United States Agency for International Development] I suppose, or something that was a substitute for it—or not?

CLEVERLEY: No. USAID was not there, but the whole mission was over a thousand. That included local hires.

Q: How did you relate to the—and who handled or how did you handle—you had a sovereign Greece, but sovereign Greece was also part of the EU [European Union] by then. How did that work?

CLEVERLEY: Well, the multilateral aspect of the European Union component of our work with Greece was mainly handled by the economic and the political sections, depending on the issues. But Greece, itself, was such a unique place that bilateral issues were normally predominant.

Q: Why?

How Greece saw the United States

CLEVERLEY: Perhaps less in those days than during my earlier tour, but so much of Greece's view of the world was focused through a bilateral prism with the United States. Our relationship was very important to us in both a political and economic context because of Greece's location, our bases there, Greece's membership in NATO, the frictions with Turkey, Greece's role in the EU, and many other reasons.

Many Greeks saw us, in a way, as a country that had interfered in their democratic processes during the early days of the Cold War. They accused us of later being behind the coup and dictatorship. They thought that we called the shots, and anything that went wrong was our fault. Many harbored a Balkan Byzantine mentality that was very different from what you find in Western Europe, seeing things happening as a result of conspiracies. They were easily inflamed, and that was why we had so many demonstrations in front of the embassy. Anything that went wrong had to be because of the United States, so many thought.

Q: Yeah. So, that part hadn't changed since you were there before.

CLEVERLEY: No, it had not changed, although there was a growing trend to displace the United States from that harrowed position of culpability to be replaced by the EU, particularly Germany. In my earlier assignment, the issue of Macedonia was a tinderbox. Now, Serbia was the hot issue. When I got there, the bombing had stopped, and Milosevic was still in power, but many thought that we had treated Milosevic poorly.

Q: How did they think he should have been treated?

CLEVERLEY: Well, many Greeks said you had to look at all the sins on the other side too. Atrocities had been going on in the Balkans for centuries, so, what was new? You could try to argue the issue, but they didn't counter with coherent arguments. It was often very frustrating to sit at a dinner party with an emotional Greek next to you going off on this subject with far-fetched claims. You didn't want to get hot in the middle of the event, but you still needed to defend your policy. It was sometimes difficult.

Q: How did they feel about having an ambassador named—who had just been ambassador to, what was it, Bosnia? Did you say?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. They weren't anti-Bosnian. They were pro-Serbian.

Q: Explain that. Explain that.

CLEVERLEY: That meant, Bosnia was okay. It was just another country over there, on the other side of the border. And Tom, they knew anyway, because he had been in Greece a lot, and was respected. But Clinton had done Serbia. You know, Clinton came to Greece a few months before I got there that summer, and the whole visit was disrupted by huge demonstrations throughout the center of Athens. It was the most failed visit I've ever seen. These were violent demonstrations, burning cars, breaking shop windows, and things like that.

The post should have never let it happen, because you could just look out the window and see what was going to happen if Clinton showed up at that time. They didn't turn off the visit and hoped a visit by the President of the United States would eventually be applauded. But the only way you could have avoided this was to not have it. They should have turned it off.

Q: Is it possible to turn off a White House visit when the White House wants to do something? I mean, you raise—

CLEVERLEY: I think it is possible. It is not necessarily easy, but you have to lay out some very good arguments about what the likely downsides will be. Or if it does happen, you have to be prepared for the eventualities. But just on security arguments alone, I believe the visit could have been postponed or rescheduled. The White House does not like disasters.

Q: Yeah, very often, the Secret Service is useful in that process because they come very early. And sometimes, they grasp and understand particularly if there is potential violence involved. They sometimes see things that the White House may not yet be prepared to see. Did you find that to be true or it just was never activated? Once it is public, it is hard to back down.

CLEVERLEY: At that moment. I think there may have been a lot of hubris on the part of the embassy. Again, it happened a few months before I got there. But from what I could see and hear, it seems that the embassy should have foreseen the outcome.

The DCM's Job: Managing People Problems

So, what else could I say? I guess, because the leadership of the embassy was in the hands of some good and experienced officers, it made it easier for me to do my job as DCM. However, when I arrived, there was a section led by a senior officer who was badly performing. Nick Burns told me he wanted her replaced. He knew it was going to be hard because she was a female officer from a minority group, the only one on the country team. Somebody might claim that the removal was for unacceptable reasons.

When I saw how the section was being run, it was very clear that something was wrong with the officer, perhaps a mental issue, maybe dementia. So, it was clear why the

ambassador needed her to go. It was not an easy task, but something that had to be done gradually and carefully, with the full cooperation of the Department. Getting a replacement took several months during which time, I was essentially running the management section. It was extremely sensitive and difficult. I had to be working with her deputies to make sure that things didn't fall through the slats while we were going through the process of replacing her. But I found that for me as DCM, it was much easier dealing with a vacancy than with an officer not doing their job.

Q: Is that a hazard of the times in which we are living, having trouble integrating fully across our society, all Americans? Or is there something standard, is there anything systemic or managerial that is missing today on the side of the Foreign Service or the State Department that makes cases like this so delicate? And so, potentially damaging that rather than deal with them, they are left to fester and then they really become a problem?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I think it is understandable. There has been so much discrimination in the past, and in the Foreign Service as well, that at some point, people who wanted a better managed system tried to protect those who might easily have been discriminated against. And they put into place standards and accommodation and things that are meant to protect officers from inappropriate types of actions, words, or whatever, particularly from managers and supervisors. And it is a good thing that we have them.

Sometimes, it has been legislated through Congress. I mentioned earlier, the visually impaired officer that we had in Helsinki, and we actually had the concept of *reasonable accommodation* as a provision of laws meant to protect disadvantaged people in that regard. The result, however, is that when an action is taken against someone in one of those categories, you have to prove that it is legitimate. You have to have examples stated very clearly. And they have to be really carefully documented.

One of the things that Eric Edelman taught me from his experiences in the deputy secretary's office was to document carefully any case with a potential for appeal or grievance. I did that and am glad I did. Even after I retired, I've had occasions to refer to those files in discussions with the Department.

Q: Yeah, the same thing happened to Douglass.

CLEVERLEY: So, he's been through this.

Q: He has been there. The files were the crucial evidence.

CLEVERLEY: That matters, yeah. In the case I've been discussing, we agreed with her to go a medical route, so it wasn't all based on performance. It made it a little bit easier. She left post and went into retirement. Overall, this was just the first of many difficult cases that reached my desk. In one, I had a guy who tried to, and nearly did, kill his wife and another of a wife who threatened to kill her husband.

Two different cases. Our political counselor in the middle of the Iraqi invasion wrote a letter to the *New York Times* telling he was resigning over the operation, but didn't tell any of us until the morning it was printed. His wife was all of a sudden stranded in Athens because he was no longer eligible for embassy housing. As he quit and left the country, she was left trying to pick up all the ends. In another case, our medical officer thought a single male employee was sexually abusing his son. These types of things ultimately were my job as DCM to manage, and they came in an unending stream. We talked about this earlier. They are not things that most people who work in the embassy ever hear about.

Q: Does that have something to do with selection today? Or does it have to do with the fact that people change so much over a stable career? You're not in your 40s or 50s, who were you when you came in? How do you assess the number and difficulty, and to the outsider, the improbability of so many such cases?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I think anytime you take a group of a thousand people and say five hundred of them are Americans, all kinds of things that might go on at home happen abroad, too. Maybe slightly more—

Q: That the Foreign Service is more representative than people think.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, well, in this regard. It's also more difficult than people who are not in the Foreign Service understand. There are a lot of pressures living in a relatively isolated place abroad. Take a place like Athens where you've got all of these security pressures, you've got commuting issues, and you probably don't speak the language. It's a very foreign environment, especially for a lot of people who don't get out to meet Greeks. Not everybody did.

Q: How important is good health? Just general good health because it sounds like you are describing an environment for somebody who doesn't almost meet military health standards, would have a very hard time.

CLEVERLEY: Well, yes, a lot of these things are mental health types of issues. I think the pressures that Foreign Service families go through are sometimes a lot more and of a different nature than ordinary people encounter. So, I'm just saying if you take five hundred Americans and put them someplace that it is not a real friendly environment, for many, these issues percolate.

At home, it's likely you can handle them more effectively. But abroad, there is no extended family or old friends for a spouse to turn to. Trusted counselors who might understand where you are, are harder to find. The support mechanisms that we have built into our everyday life at home in the United States may not exist when you are living abroad. You may feel dependent on other people in the embassy, but sometimes it's hard to develop long-term deep relationships with other embassy families. At some point, when these things overflow, they come up to the medical officer or the security officer,

the DCM or the ambassador. And nobody else knows how frequently these things happen because of confidentiality.

Q: Does that have or are you, I don't mean to put words in your mouth—but if we are more representative, the Foreign Service, the embassies—if they are more representative of average Americans than most of America realizes, are you suggesting that either one has to accept that you will have an inordinate number of difficulties because it is so difficult? Or that maybe there is a need for more special kinds of standards and qualifications than we now find we have or we can accept?

CLEVERLEY: I raise these issues as part of our discussion about a DCM's job. They were things I faced during my time as DCM in more than one post. I have always got satisfaction from helping others, and I enjoyed having a chance to support members of the mission when they needed it, even if the resolution entailed getting them back to Washington. Sometimes it was a challenge to take on and resolve difficult issues. I mentioned a military officer under the embassy's umbrella who tried to murder his wife. He claimed that some Greeks on motorbikes were responsible for the attack, and our regional security officer was beginning to believe that. I didn't, though. Things didn't fit into place, and I pushed the security officer to keep investigating. When they finally found enough evidence to accuse the officer of attempted murder, the man was taken to Italy for court martial. I was grateful to be able to get to the bottom of something that was truly horrible. But the stream cases like these were often exhausting. Some of them were very difficult for me personally, and I was fatigued from the job by the time it was over.

I guess one of the characteristics of today's embassy, as opposed to say fifty for sixty years ago, is that the embassy traditionally was composed of a bunch of professional people who had gone through a very demanding examination process specifically to go abroad into diplomatic work. They sought an international profession and had aspired to it. The majority in today's embassy are people who want a profession, and this one just happens to be abroad. The commitment to a foreign lifestyle is probably different. Of the cases that I just mentioned to you, only one of them was a Foreign Service officer, the one who resigned because of Iraq. The guy who tried to kill his wife—my wife went to the hospital to see her and she was almost dead – was a military officer.

Q: Wow. He should have presumably been highly selected and trained, but never mind.

CLEVERLEY: The employee who said his wife took a knife out and was going to kill him was a technical person. The officer who was accused of abusing his son was not a Foreign Service officer. It turned out he didn't do what he was accused of, but when something like this comes to the DCM's attention, you are riveted with the case anyway. There are so many protections built into the system that we had a team from Washington out within twenty-four hours with medical people and a social worker.

Anyway, going back to the original question, what I encountered in that big embassy was almost overpowering from time to time. But everything had to be dealt with in a proper way that protected people.

Q: Yeah, how much of your time ended up being spent on special cases like these, out of your overall responsibility function portfolio?

CLEVERLEY: Well, I think I would say sixty-five percent of the DCM job was related to management, post management, and personnel management issues. And maybe of that, some twenty-five to thirty percent dealt with individual problems. Let me make one final point here, however. The DCM can often easily hide from these issues, perhaps delegating them to lower-level officers as happened to me in Pretoria, for example, or by simply ignoring them. To me, that is a dereliction of duty. And it is playing a high-risk game that these problems don't come back to roost on the DCM's shoulder in a larger way one day. Maybe this is one reason why they told us in the DCM course that only ten percent of DCMs were successful.

The IT Revolution in Embassies

Q: What about IT [information technology]? You haven't mentioned the digital infrastructure, and by this time—we certainly weren't where we are today—but the internet and digital technology was beginning to very much impinge on diplomacy and on embassy operations. Did you have modern up-to-date internet at the desk, or were you still this pre-Colin Powell caveman and just swept away a lot of the impedimenta that had prevented it? What did technology at the embassy look like? Because presumably, that would have been part of your brief as well.

CLEVERLEY: I was interested in office technology from the very beginning. I asked for a programmable desk calculator when I was in Milan on my first assignment, and the administrative officer asked what I could possibly use it for? As an economic officer, I recognized the value of computers as they reached our horizon.

Q: And the need to understand the substantive work. How does an econ officer work without a calculator in those days?

CLEVERLEY: So, yeah, it was a very high priority. And it is one issue that I pushed very hard for in Athens. The State Department was always slow in acquiring new technologies, and it wasn't always coming up with the best solutions. I mean, we were going to WordPerfect when everybody was writing on Word. But before WordPerfect, we were doing Wang when everybody was doing WordPerfect. We were always struggling to get the equipment and software we needed. I think, as we got into the early 2000s, the State Department finally got the message that this is what the future looked like, and it had to do whatever possible to get the types of equipment that we needed to do our work.

Sometimes, officers were not as creative or thoughtful as they needed to be. Sometimes even the IT officers weren't. In Helsinki when I was DCM, for example, I called the IT chief and said I wanted a database that had all our front office contacts. I wanted a way that we could do a guest list, pulling it off our database, and so on. And he answered, "Well, you know, those are really difficult things to get, and they are expensive types of

software.” So, I started researching it myself and discovered Outlook was already on our computers. It wasn't as great as it eventually would be, but Outlook certainly was better than anything that we had ever had before. I talked to him about Outlook, and he didn't know anything about it. This was an officer sent from Washington to oversee our IT needs.

Q: And help people understand why that was.

CLEVERLEY: Outlook was a program that was meant to manage data on a people-friendly basis so you could put together a database very easily. The content was simple to do. I could do all kinds of things with Outlook. It wasn't the professional type of contact database software that we would eventually get, but it was easily workable.

In another case, in Athens we had an IT officer who was overseeing our daily IT needs. She had this idea that if we had an announcement to make, we could put it on some type of site where people can find and read it. I couldn't understand that. To me, she was missing the point. I told her there are certain things that people look for, but announcements, they usually wait to receive them. You don't look for an announcement. So, we needed ways of propagating messages. The more we propagated information to our offices, the more successful we could communicate. She had real difficulty understanding that. I don't think she liked me after that for the rest of her tour.

Q: Was she younger?

CLEVERLEY: She was a mid-level officer. When I saw that she didn't get that, I went to her boss and explained the same thing. He got it. Maybe I should have done that in the first place, but I was hoping to be a bit more collegial.

Q: Yeah. I know you have to wrap things up a little early today. I want to start the next section further exploring this conundrum—that you are not the only person who faced but you have barely scratched the surface of the difficulties of adjusting the Foreign Service, the State Department and American diplomacy in general, to a world that was emerging more rapidly than the institutional infrastructure and the corporate culture, were able to cope with.

And I want you to think about, I think they were mostly men of a certain age, who owned the IT because they were communicators. And very few people appreciate the institutional role of the guys who made cables possible and the function of communicators. And the challenge inherent from the beginning of a crashing new world of technology and digital reality coming down, not only on the ambassador and the DCM, but also the people on whom the operational responsibility fell for sorting it out. I want you to think about that because I think you have some very valuable experience and insights at a hinge moment around 2004 American diplomacy—for embassies, for the Foreign Service and for the State Department.

Q: Today is March 28, and this is Stephanie Kinney, continuing the oral history session eleven with Michael Cleverley. Michael, at the end of the last session, we were wrapping up on Greece and you were looking forward to finally getting to go to Rome. And before we head for Rome, I wonder if you have any last points you'd like to make about your Greek tour? And we had also introduced the idea, I think I had asked you about IT [information technology], and we talked a little bit about communicators and communications at that particular point in history, at the turn of the 20th, end of the 21st century.

So, what comments do you want to add to your Greece tour? And what experience, thoughts have you had on the infrastructure realities and the new communication and new challenges posed to diplomacy in general, and the embassies? And your embassy in particular, with regards to the emergence of not just commercial email, but the internet and the web, for which the State Department was still not manifestly prepared?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, okay. Well, I mentioned in our earlier discussion the heavy concentration of various types of management issues that I had to deal with while I was in Athens. But I don't want to give the impression that I wasn't doing a lot of other things. And some of the things were actually quite important and meaningful, and so I would like to talk about those for a minute. And then we can go on to a sidebar on IT and my impressions over the various years. I was in the field most of the time IT infiltrated how we did work in the embassy. So, in terms of what I was doing in the office besides management in Athens, one of the things that I took with me is—

Q: You mean, you were bilingual? You could do both policy and management and integrate the two? My!

CLEVERLEY: Yes, that is something rather novel, huh? But that is what you ended up doing a lot in this business.

Q: I would argue that I would hope those are the kinds of diplomats we are going to be forming more professionally in the future. Because yours was an unusual talent and experience instead of skills. That is why I think this is such a valuable interview.

CLEVERLEY: Well, thank you. One of the things that I wanted to do in Athens was outreach, to get out of the embassy. As I mentioned, I could not leave the embassy on my own, or just with Seija. When outside the embassy, you know, I had to have my full security detail, on weekends, Sunday, any day, any evening. It was a very strict regime that the RSO [regional security officer] and the DS [Diplomatic Security Service] had imposed on certain people in the embassy, after many losses. It was an effective regime, and they were not compromising on it at all.

Diplomacy at Mount Athos

But I did want to do outreach in various forms. I traveled extensively, especially on weekends. And sometimes it was on my own time, but, nevertheless, it was the easiest way. For example, one trip I made was to Mount Athos, a series of Orthodox monasteries on a peninsula in Northern Greece. Somewhat like Vatican City, Mount Athos was self-governing, and to go there you needed a visa, for example. It was about as close as you could get to traveling into the medieval period. It has been maintained for over a thousand years as a very medieval regime. No female people, or no female creatures are supposed to be found in Mount Athos.

Q: So how do they reproduce?

CLEVERLEY: They don't reproduce in Mount Athos.

Q: All right, if that's your thing, I guess.

CLEVERLEY: The place obviously was not from our world, but it was not foreign to the Orthodox. Nor to medieval thought, either. Traditionally, many Orthodox countries established their own monastery in Mount Athos. There was a Russian monastery, a Serbian monastery, and Greek monasteries. And they all had their own character, which was developed over the ages from the base Byzantine culture that had established Athos.

Q: Sort of like Rhodes during the Crusades where each country had its own Templars. Each country had its own representation, although it was military, not primarily religious. Is that the idea?

CLEVERLEY: Very similar to that. Think of medieval Rhodes. You know, old Rhodes is one of the greatest medieval towns in Europe. As is Athos one of the most medieval religious enclaves in today's Europe. From outward appearances it is frozen in about the year 1400.

I went there with a friend, Apostolos Goulas, a University of Thessaloniki engineering professor who was Orthodox, who knew some of the monks in Athos. He set up visits to some of the monasteries, and I went there representing the American Embassy, as the number two in the embassy. I made calls on some of the Athos community's leaders. It was something that had not happened in Athos very often.

Then, too, I had to be surrounded by security, and the visit had to be coordinated through the Greek authorities. We got there on a Greek Coast Guard boat, even though it was a peninsula. Few vehicles go to Athos. There were Greek police as well as my own bodyguard. Our presence was a bit of a novelty in this medieval setting. But our ecclesiastical hosts were gracious. They seemed honored that somebody from the American Embassy wanted to discover who they were and what they did. They were proud of their community, even though in a sense it was backward compared to what we are used to, even on mainland Greece. And still, it was their world, and it was a world sacred to them.

We went from monastery to monastery, and every visit was something unforgettable. The Greek police had a Jeep so sometimes I didn't have to walk from one monastery to the next. It was a day trip, and I didn't spend the night. When evening came, the last monastery we visited was especially hospitable. The abbot and I sat at dinner around the rustic wooden tables with all the monks. We chatted and exchanged views in Greek. There were also a couple of American monks. One had grown up in Florida.

Q: Oh my word.

CLEVERLEY: And then it was dark, and it was time for me to leave with the Coast Guard whose boat was moored down the hill at the monastery's pier. We said our goodbyes, and I started walking down the long pathway. Behind me, the monks carrying candles and lanterns double filed down the curvy road all the way to the pier where the boat was waiting, and they stood there with their candles when we left.

Q: Oh my gosh. Talk about an unforgettable image and memory.

CLEVERLEY: It was one of the most powerful moments I experienced in my Foreign Service. They did it not because it was me. They did it because the United States wanted to come to see their monasteries and learn about their lives and work as monks.

Q: It was a return homage.

The DCM and Outreach

CLEVERLEY: Getting out wearing my red, white, and blue as number two in the embassy often earned a strong positive reaction among our hosts. When the ambassador did it, it wasn't always so easy. His was such a ceremonial position in a country like Greece that there was a tremendous amount of ceremonial baggage that the ambassador necessarily had to carry with him when he went out. But for me, I could do something like that, and it was very rewarding.

Q: Were embassy officers, other younger foreign service officers, empowered, interested and enabled to do the same?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, they were if—

Q: And did they?

CLEVERLEY: If they were inclined. I think it would have been the same for a young officer, too. One officer rotated through my section on my first tour in Athens, for example. During his rotation in the consular section, Karl had made an acquaintance with Father Yanni, a monk in Meteora. Meteora was also a grouping of Middle Age monasteries built on cliffs high in the air to protect themselves from Turks or whoever was attacking. The monk, Father Yannis, was nearly blind, and when he came to Athens to get a visa to go to the United States for care, he developed friends in the embassy.

Q: Yeah, I've always wondered how they ever got the thing built up there. Can you explain?

CLEVERLEY: In the Middle Ages, the monasteries were built atop these huge cliffs as ecclesiastical fortresses. The monks lived in them with barrels of wine, water, and food storage and could survive up there for quite a while.

Anyway, Karl made acquaintance with Father Yanni. He came to Athens to get a visa to go to the United States—he was visually impaired—every year for surgery. Father Yanni hosted visits to Meteora. When I was traveling there once, Karl encouraged me to find Father Yannis. This was during my first tour in Athens and during my second tour we always looked for Father Yannis. We found him years later after retiring and even had a chance to meet his mother in a nearby village.

These types of things, getting out and making a linkage into society, whether with a monk or the local mayor, had value for our public diplomacy efforts. They mattered in a Greece that too often turned a skeptical eye toward the United States, in a country that had such ambivalent feelings towards the United States. Being able to meet someone from the embassy had meaning to them, and to our efforts to cast the United States as the friendly ally it was.

Representation mattered, too. I mentioned this in an earlier session that Athens was a night society. I'm sure you have seen that in other countries as well. Sometimes, we received dinner invitations for eleven o'clock in the evening. We would get home at three o'clock in the morning. We reciprocated, but never that late. We would start at 8:00pm or 8:30pm.

Q: Would people show up at 8:00pm or 8:30pm, or not until 11:00 pm?

CLEVERLEY: If it was before 8:00 pm or 8:30 pm, they probably wouldn't have. For sure they would be late anyway. In Finland and Scandinavia, people waited on the street so they could arrive on the clock.

Q: Exactly.

CLEVERLEY: In Greece, people are typically late, and sometimes Greek men might show up with another woman besides their wife, you know.

Q: My first dinner party in Venezuela was a disaster because nobody showed up until 11:00 pm and the tenderloin was, shall we say, more over done than I had anticipated.

CLEVERLEY: We were exhausted from our schedule because we were out or hosting our own event four or five days a week. That was after we regretted maybe two thirds of the invitations. When we got to Saturday, we sometimes slept in late to catch up. The Greeks had a siesta in the middle of the day, but we didn't at the American Embassy. We had to

be at work between 7:00 am and 8:30 am, whatever it was on your varied schedule. So a short night's sleep was common.

On-the-Ground – “Everyday” – Diplomacy

I had several undertakings as DCM in Athens that underlined the crucial role diplomacy can play in our everyday career. But rarely was this at the summit of big world-class events. When Clinton negotiated Russian concurrence with NATO expansion in the Helsinki talks with Yeltsin, I stood outside a closed door with the visit book under my arm. But in Athens, I was up to my neck in less visible negotiations that nevertheless were of serious importance to the United States: a Status of Forces agreement, security for the Athens Olympics, and purchasing a long contested lot for an embassy annex.

One of the DCM's responsibilities in Athens was to chair the American side of a bilateral team that negotiated issues related to the Status of Forces Agreement [SOFA]. We specifically focused on ironing out some difficult lingering issues holding up the Comprehensive Technical Agreement [CTA] that updated our bilateral SOFA. In addition were negotiations related to the American bases. In Crete, our facility at Souda Bay was one of the most important naval and air facilities we had in the Mediterranean area. On our side were lawyers and officers from the Office of Defense Cooperation [ODC], the Defense Attaché's office, the Souda Bay commander and other embassy officers.

The Souda Bay airstrip was longer than any other military runway in the area, and the bay itself was deep, deep enough for an aircraft carrier to dock and submarines to operate. We had been there for a long time, and it was of high importance for supporting the reach of the American military across the Mediterranean and into the Middle East. Souda was a key waypoint and staging area during the build up to the Iraq invasion in 1993.

The talks, and the relationship more generally, were sometimes problematic because of the local issues that tended to complicate normal operations such as shore leave. For example, the mayor of Chania, the nearest city, was a leftist with no sympathy for the United States in spite of the fact that during our port calls American sailors unloaded a pile of money. We had cases where American sailors got mobbed in Chania and were arrested instead of the locals. This eventually reached the point where the Navy decided to allow no more port calls in Souda. Our ships used the facilities but kept the sailors onboard. So, it was one of the many cases I saw during my tours where the Greeks so amply and so well stuck their thumb in their own eyes.

The Greeks were difficult negotiators in our meetings. We spent much time in our meetings looking for workable compromises. We alternated meeting at Souda and in Athens. Our counterparts on the Greek side were from the MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], the Ministry of Defense, and Souda Greek base command. Heading the Greek team as my counterpart was the head of the MFA's North America office.

The CTA had been initialed in early 2000, but when I arrived that summer it was still not signed due to unresolved Greek concerns. We were negotiating them when I got to Athens. SOFA negotiations quite often can be pretty complicated because at least superficially they have a lot to do with the sovereignty and image the host country wants to protect. The host government wants to avoid being seen as stooges or puppets of the American military and want their legal prerogatives protected, sometimes more than necessary. On our side, our forces have their own often unique needs for facilitating their global mission. It was a long and difficult process, but we produced an agreement that insured our presence in Greece for several more years. Souda still continues to be one of our most important installations in the Mediterranean.

Q: Yeah. SOFAs are something that the American public is virtually unaware of, much less has any sense of the complexity and the importance, and the value of it. Politically, it tends to be written off as giving money to foreigners that we could better spend at home. And that has gotten worse over the succeeding generations of peace and prosperity and as you pointed out, there is a certain value for these agreements being conducted as quietly and as delicately, and with as much finesse as possible. How do you square that conundrum? That dilemma? Particularly as we go forward into the 21st century? Do you have any thoughts on that? Or, you know, should succeeding generations be, is it just a question of better education? Is it a question of how administrations talk about it? Is it up to diplomats themselves to do a better job of providing a vocabulary and language for understanding it? You say the word SOFA and anybody who is in the business knows, but it is Greek to everybody else.

CLEVERLEY: From my experience, I think we've handled it on the American side quite well over the years by keeping quiet. Not because there is anything to hide, but I think the American public can accept the idea that we need to ensure provisions to have a base facility where your ships dock and are supplied and repaired, or an airstrip where a space shuttle can land if it needs to unexpectedly. People can accept the idea that you pay for things like that. But with SOFA talks already a hot potato in the host country, opening it up as a political issue at home too, unnecessarily complicates the ability to compromise toward an arrangement that especially promotes our interests.

It becomes a lot more complicated if there are hostilities in the environment, like for example, in Iraq. Towards the end of the Iraq War, we were negotiating the SOFA with the Iraqis and the issues became public. A hard line for us is always if there are restrictions put on the U.S. military in a war zone. That is very difficult to manage in a public affairs environment. Fortunately, we didn't have to deal with anything like that.

It can be tricky for a host nation government to justify to its public that it is allowing Americans to use their soil when an American sailor gets into a brawl, and somebody is killed. And who is going to take jurisdiction? In Greece, with such political diversity across the spectrum, the idea of American sailors being subject to American laws rather than Greek laws was very hard for a communist mayor or the Greek government to accept.

Q: Yeah and it is analogous, but dramatically different in magnitude. The number of people in New York City who get upset because diplomats from their perspective abuse parking or don't pay parking fines because of diplomatic immunity?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, and it seems to have an aura around it, of unfairness. It becomes much more difficult. The resistance to that type of arrangement starts to quickly grow. It was important of course to be uncompromising. If somebody got in trouble, they paid the price for it one way or another.

Security for the 2004 Athens Olympics

Another issue I dealt with was Olympic security. I mentioned earlier that it was important for the United States government that security surrounding the 2004 Athens Olympics was tight and effective. Otherwise, there would be the question over whether we could let American athletes participate. This caught their attention. Adequate security required a lot of money and resources: hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, ultimately billions, not just a few dollars here and there.

The private sector would have to build the security structure around the games, and that opened opportunities for American companies. Local law enforcement officials could in no way assume the tasks associated with securing that type of event. Initially, we invested a lot of time convincing the Greek government of the stakes and the need to budget adequately for Olympic security. We were eventually successful at this, and the Greek government started setting aside adequate sums of money and conceptualizing the types of work that needed to be done. But when it started tendering on projects, things quickly got very messy, especially when American companies began to compete against European companies for contracts of that size.

Fairly early on, someone planted an allegation in the press that Tom Miller, the American ambassador, was getting paid by an American company to pressure the Greek government. It was not true, and the purpose of the accusation was to disable high-level advocacy efforts coming out of the American Embassy. We wanted an American company to get these contracts because we thought they were the best and most experienced. We could trust them more. But the disinformation, as intended, undermined Tom's ability to be an effective public advocate for American firms. He felt he had to recuse himself from the Olympics security and gave that task to me.

So, during the last two years of my term in Athens, I was very much involved with lobbying the Greek government to ensure adequate resources for the games and connecting American companies with Greek officials. We wanted an honest, fair tender process for Olympic security. We wanted American companies on an equal footing. It was hard for them because it was illegal in the United States for an American company to bribe foreign officials like some Europeans did. Many Greek politicians were politicians for that very reason: the bribes were what the job was all about. Corruption was prevalent at every level of government. I wasn't there when the contracts were finally awarded, but some of the companies that I was spearheading won contracts after I left.

Q: Yeah. Not the typical sort of thing people think of diplomats as being responsible for or doing.

CLEVERLEY: No, they don't probably realize that. American companies did. They understood that without getting United States government advocacy, it was going to be a harder road. And the fact that the United States wasn't satisfied with security helped a lot in the Greek environment. They feared there would be repercussions. They listened when we talked to them.

Q: Can you provide any short examples of the kinds of things that needed to be satisfied? Or I don't know whether you can shorthand it, just so that people have an idea of, you know, what were we talking about operationally here?

CLEVERLEY: We are talking about a lot of technical issues: a unified all force control center, a lot of equipment, access, securing event sites, how people were screened and got admitted to events. You were talking a lot about communications that allowed various elements in the process to communicate with each other real time, not just by cellphone, but through official channels.

Q: How well-developed were cellphones in 2003, 2004?

CLEVERLEY: Well, the iPhone did not come out until about 2007 and a Finnish company Nokia dominated the cell phone market with what we then thought were sophisticated devices. Top of the line, however, was the Blackberry which allowed easy email access, something we knew then could revolutionize the Foreign Service. The iPhone was a quantum leap in cell phones. But we were using cellphones as a means of communication, a decade before that.

Q: Yeah, in Europe, particularly.

CLEVERLEY: In Europe particularly. So, cellphones, you know, were a part of the communications.

Q: What about stove piping among governments, among agencies, across functional responsibilities, jurisdictions and lines? How did you handle that? Was the cellphone the answer? Everybody was on the same net and that made it easier, or were there other elements involved that you also had to contend with? Because just communication within the inter-agency of the USG [United States government] is no small thing. I can imagine that there was more than just the USG and its private sector involved.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. I mean, when planning security cellphones were a prerequisite, but they weren't the real deal. The real deal was your control center where you had a group of inter-agency and governmental ties. You had everyone from customs and the military, to regular police, to counterterrorism police, all participating in the same control center and

through that center, then you could channel communications in an official way to the right people at the right time.

Q: Now, was that just USG? Or was that USG plus Greece plus other entities?

CLEVERLEY: I wasn't there to see the actual process, but I imagine it was a Greek control center, with liaison including American and other country connections.

Q: So, everybody was feeding into that.

CLEVERLEY: Everybody was feeding into that. One conduit with the operation center connected Americans. But that was not it. It was a Greek control center. They had it under their own control, and the people who manned it had to be trained and effective. So, there was obviously a training component as well as the parts and equipment. That is why it costs so much money.

The Diplomacy of Buying a “Parking Lot”

Another thing that kept me busy was a lot, a vacant lot behind the embassy. At some point in history, the embassy had convinced the Greek government to rent the lot to us. It was actually owned by the civil servants' union, and they were forced by the Greek government to rent it to us for maybe, I can't remember, nine hundred dollars a year, totally nominal, and could not raise the rent without government approval. We used it for parking because there was no other parking. But as property prices rose over the years, there was continual agitation on the part of the union for a great deal more. It was a leftist union. They couldn't understand why the United States Embassy was exploiting them and getting away with it. Actually, we were exploiting them for something like nine hundred dollars a year. The lot had value.

We also needed to build a new annex to the embassy because we were overgrowing our space. It was a beautiful embassy in Athens designed by Gropius, but it was forty years old, built in the early sixties, and we needed more office space. So, there was an effort within the Office of Building Operations [OBO] to design and build a new annex. To do that, we would have to have that lot. The embassy had been negotiating to buy the lot for twenty years, or maybe thirty years. We had never been able to get an agreement between the Greek union and the department's OBO, probably because neither side trusted each other. The Greeks were certain that we would exploit them again whatever the price.

Q: And what is OBO?

CLEVERLEY: It is the Office of Building Operations.

Q: Overseas Buildings [and] Operations, yeah. It is part of the State Department admin empire.

CLEVERLEY: That's right.

Q: Or now, management empire.

CLEVERLEY: It was the operations that built buildings. It was the State Department operations that bought properties and administered properties for the State Department.

Q: Yeah, it has its own building in Rosslyn.

CLEVERLEY: It does. The job of procuring the property was given to me as one of my tasks.

Q: After twenty years, you were expected to make this work.

CLEVERLEY: That was the case. I had a capable mid-level officer, Diane Brown, seconded from one of the sections to work on this with me. I immediately found that on the Greek side you had these old leftist civil servant bureaucrats who no matter what you said wouldn't believe you. And on the other side, you had these aggressive guys from Washington who were often quite clueless and didn't know how to take advantage of openings or good offers. As the discussions drew out over the months and years, they ended up paying more money than needed by not accepting good faith offers earlier.

I realized that the way to get around the chronic impasse, of course, was first to build a functional relationship with OBO. Even though OBO was part of the State Department, the negotiators were headed by a retired United States Army colonel who had a fairly minimal sense of diplomacy.

Q: Was that Taylor?

CLEVERLEY: No, it wasn't General Taylor. The OBO people worked for General Taylor, OBO's director, who probably trusted the colonel because he was from the military. He was forceful and uncompromising, but that was not an asset when dealing with Greeks who had too many years of muscular Turkish dominance in their cultural memory. It had to be just the opposite, you know, sort of "buddy-buddy," a little bit compromising to soften things up, as you build a personal relationship.

That is the role I realized I needed to follow with the Greeks. I worked very hard at it, going to the offices of these people to chat, and inviting them to receptions and dinners. They were impressed that someone senior from the embassy came to them, wanting to talk to them, and inviting them to a dinner party or a reception at the embassy. They began to soften the dialogue and offers. These things had never happened before. But to connect the two sides was extremely difficult. Every time the Greeks would be about ready to go with a deal, the OBO came back saying the Greek side wanted too much money.

Unfortunately, time was not really on OBO's side. The next year, the Greeks started out asking for more than they were asking before, and the continual rise in property values

during those years was their justification. When we finally reached a deal, I calculated we ended up paying \$5 million more for that piece of property than we could have paid if we had been willing to take the previous year's offer when they first made it. We paid over \$20 million. But we got the lot, and a new annex now sits on it. We eventually reached our objectives but paid a lot more for it than if we had been better at negotiating. One more time, I saw that when you are dealing with people who are not of an American mindset, competence, or the fact you may even be right, doesn't matter as much as personal relationships.

Q: Yep, that's true in most of the world.

The Athens Embassy on 9/11

CLEVERLEY: Nick Burns left the post in August 2001 to become American ambassador to NATO. Tom Miller was going to arrive the last of September, and I was chargé for several weeks. I asked our extremely effective Consul General, Betsy Anderson, to serve as my acting DCM. During that interim period between Nick's departure and Tom's arrival, the World Trade Center was attacked in New York, on 9/11.

Q: Oh, my Lord.

CLEVERLEY: Of course, Athens was already a critical terrorist-threat mission. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks in New York and especially Washington, it was unclear how extensive the attack had been and whether it was still underway. One news report we received said the State Department had also been hit. In formulating our defensive response, our question was what we should do that we hadn't already done. There was no immediate instructions from Washington, at least that pertained to our situation.

The news of the attacks in New York and on the Pentagon came in the early afternoon. We saw it unfold in the embassy's executive suite on CNN [Cable News Network]. I watched real time when the plane hit the second tower. Our only source of information for about forty-eight hours was the media. We could not get anything out of Washington. I talked to the legal attaché who headed our FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] office. I talked to the defense attaché and to the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. Nobody had reliable information as to what had happened or was still happening. We knew that the World Trade Center had been destroyed and the Pentagon badly damaged. We could see that on CNN.

Q: You are talking about 9/11, to be specific.

CLEVERLEY: To be specific, we are talking about 9/11 which happened on the 11th of September 2001.

Q: So, let's be clear for history what we are talking about. So, the Trade Center is bombed in New York, the Twin Towers are down. It is an attack. No one, most of the

country has never heard of Osama bin Laden and you all can't get anything more than CNN reports out of Washington for twenty-four hours, forty-eight hours.

CLEVERLEY: No details were available on what we had just seen on CNN. When we saw the second plane crash into the towers, we realized this was a concerted attack. And even the CNN information initially was conflicting. For example, there was a report that there have been multiple bombings on the Mall in the center of Washington; another that the State Department itself had been bombed. No one in our antiterrorism-gearred, multi-agency mission was able to provide a clear picture of what was happening until slowly information began trickling in later the following day. Part of that, of course, was that Washington itself was still trying to understand what had happened. But I don't recall any alerts, warnings, or instructions reaching us for the first 24-48 hours. So, nobody knew exactly what the whole picture looked like. For us, in an already threatened embassy, it was imperative to decide how to respond to what we did know.

Q: Yeah. Were you too young to have been affected or to have much of a memory of when Kennedy was shot?

CLEVERLEY: Oh, I was a junior in high school, so, I remember.

Q: So, you do remember. So, there are two dates in your generation's cohort as well as the boomers that stand out, and the first one is always where you were when Kennedy was shot, and the second is probably what happened, where you were when 9/11 occurred?

CLEVERLEY: For me, I still remember clearly the day of the Kennedy assassination, but there is a lot more for me to remember about the second great national trauma, the 9/11 attacks, in my memory. The big question for us, of course, was whether more attacks were imminent or taking place on U.S. facilities abroad. We didn't know the size of the attack. So we surrounded the mission with concertina wire, sent home everybody not absolutely necessary, and I and a small group of core staff hunkered down in the embassy. I called the head of the Athens international airport and told him that we didn't know very much, but at least two attacks were from aircraft, and asked that the air authority not allow aircraft to fly over this part of the city. He said they had already met and had made that decision.

With aircraft diverted and a perimeter around the embassy, we tried to define the nature of any threat. Was there a threat to American facilities abroad, particularly in Athens, or was what was happening localized at home? When it started becoming clearer what actually had happened, we started putting together an action plan. I had asked Betsy Anderson to chair an interagency working group to deal with issues that were sure to arise.

One of the first things to confront us was the public affairs aspect of all this. A lot of Greeks, for example, said that the Americans deserved it. We wanted to project the true image that this was an unprovoked attack, and we did that through various means. Almost

immediately in the days after 9/11, an international consensus grew in support of a common response to the terrorist act. We wanted Greece to join it and sought to cultivate support among the Greek public. We also didn't want crazies among the Greek anarchists to take advantage of what had just happened to mount sympathy acts against us, and one good way was to offset potential public support for local terrorist acts in the immediate aftermath.

Among the first public affairs opportunities was a visit of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company that was supposed to land in Athens a few days later for a performance. They canceled almost immediately. Everybody in New York City was traumatized by what had happened, and besides that, air traffic had been suspended or severely cut back in the United States. I asked the local promoter to go back to the Alvin Ailey Company and quote me as chargé, saying, "Look, we understand the immense tragedy in New York City, but if you cancel your trip, that is exactly what these terrorists want to achieve. They want to paralyze our society. They want to generate a level of fear to unnerve us as a people."

To Alvin Ailey's credit, they accepted that argument and responded that if they could find air transport for their equipment, they would come to Athens." And they did, within two weeks of the terrorist strike. It was a wonderful, moving performance in the ancient Herod Atticus amphitheater on the Acropolis. They eulogized what had just happened in New York City and announced why they had not canceled their Athens tour. We had a big reception for them in our yard, and the directors of the company made powerful statements to the large crowd that attended.

Q: Did you open a book or have a place for flowers?

CLEVERLEY: No, because we didn't want anybody coming into the embassy or even near it. A lot of people in Greece didn't know exactly how to deal with the tragedy and tended to criticize the United States. But a lot more were sympathetic, and we started getting letters from people expressing their sympathy, about a thousand letters, if I remember correctly. So, we accepted the mail, and I asked our public affairs people to write an answer to each one from the Charge'. I signed every one of them.

Among those less sympathetic was the Patriarch of Athens, the top Orthodox leader in Greece named Christodoulos. He was of the opinion that again the Americans had brought this on themselves. One reason he said was the bombing of Serbia. When he made public remarks to this effect, he immediately got into trouble with the Orthodox Church in the United States. Americans, including Greek Americans, were in no mood for such nonsense during this grieved time. There was a huge outcry among Greek American Orthodox leaders in the United States toward the Athens church. This was important and potentially devastating for the Greek church because it received vast amounts of money from Greek American donors.

Q: Exactly. It does talk.

CLEVERLEY: Possibly taken back by the strong American reaction, Christodoulos asked to call on me as chargé to express his condolences. It was not exactly an apology, but nevertheless some bridge repairs. I understood what was going on and said to him, “You know, one of the things we need to remember at times like this is that there is a responsibility on the part of church leaders to still the emotions of those who carry anger and promote violence.” He got my point, nodded his head, and said yes.

This all mattered about two weeks later when Orthodox Archbishop to America Demetrios visited Athens with a group of senior Greek Americans. Many of them belonged to, I think they called it, the “100,000 Club.” These were people who had donated \$100,000 to the Orthodox Church, and obviously in light of events needed to be handled carefully by the church in Athens. Demetrios was terribly gracious. While in Athens, he gave a moving speech I attended at the University of Athens. It touched many there. When I looked around, I saw Greek men weeping as he talked about the terrorist strikes on 9/11.

During his visit, I hosted a luncheon for his group and the senior leadership of the Greek church. I placed on one side of me Demetrios and Christodoulou on the other. Christodoulos was subdued and trying to be amiable. It also seemed clear that the Greek Americans were not in the happiest mood. When I gave my toast to welcome Demetrios and Christodoulos, I said, “You know, right after the event, Christodoulos called on me to express condolences for the 9/11 attacks. During our good conversation, we agreed that church leaders have a responsibility to calm the sentiments of people who have been wronged as well as of those who perpetrate wrongs so that we don't get to the point where we experience atrocities like this.” Christodoulos was nodding his head and appearing fully on board. Everybody was looking at him because that wasn't the message they were getting in Baltimore and New York. But it got him off the hook. The edge in the atmosphere was gone. We were best friends for the rest of my tour.

The Diplomacy of Religion

Q: Mike, I don't think it is unfair to say that in your generation, and even more so succeeding, your commitment to your own faith and your fluency with faith, with the books of faith and respect for other people of faith, is notable. And I wonder to what extent you at that time or in reflection, have thought about the importance of the role of religion, fluency in religion and faith of many varieties and particularly, as a diplomat—which tends to get secularized, scholasticized, academized, ivory towerized today—in your own career; certainly, you have found yourself in a variety of situations where that comfort and fluency and understanding, insight has been very important. Have you reflected on that? Do you have any observations to make, just speaking of your own career?

CLEVERLEY: In a professional sense, I always recognized that church and religion play an important part in any society, whether you are talking about the United States, where we have thousands of churches, or you are talking about Greece, which essentially has one.

Q: Mosques and temples and newer kinds of spirituality as well in the United States. They just called it the new religious America as of about 2000 because we have so diversified our faith patterns and practices compared to a hundred years ago.

CLEVERLEY: I think that if you are going to be a diplomat, you might easily think that talking to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the beginning and the end of the dialogue. If so, you have forgotten how society in many countries is put together. I'm sure, in any embassy located in a Muslim country, you recognize the role that the Muslim faith plays. But you have to remember that even in England, or in Greece or Serbia, the same is true.

Q: South Africa, the church was central.

CLEVERLEY: South Africa, exactly.

Q: Desmond Tutu was central.

CLEVERLEY: In South Africa during the fight against apartheid and the transition, Desmond Tutu was central as were many other church people. There was diversity among the churches, but their influence was intense and not scattered. So, in a professional sense, I think that this is one of the things that you have to keep your eyes on. I liked that about Sotirhos when he was ambassador in Athens during my first tour. He would go to church every Sunday with a different congregation. It was always Orthodox, but he was Orthodox. It got a lot of attention and showed that he respected their faith. But he also saw it as a way to understand the people.

In our efforts to understand the host country and the host culture, religion has to be present. Whether people go to church every Sunday, or only once a year on Easter, it still is something you need to understand. And the Greeks: if you forget for a minute the Orthodox background of each individual who may only go to church once a year, you are never going to understand them, what makes them happy or angry. Religion often runs deep in some societies. Even the hitman of the 17 November terrorists group made religious icons as his profession. It was always important to me to have respect and understanding for local religious leaders and their ways.

Q: Do diplomats need to be at least literate in world religions? How can you do India without having some fluency in Hindu and Hinduism, and Islam? How can you do Ireland, England, North Ireland without some fluency in Catholicism and Protestantism? One can go on and on and on but the professional question I am asking, I guess, is literacy or fluency in religion.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I think literacy. I have learned that you need to be literate in the key issues pertaining to a country and its people. One area of course is history, and particularly modern history. But also, religion is another area of literacy that you should develop. If I were going to India, I would definitely want to understand much better than

I do now the Hindu faith, and how it affects people individually and also their government. What is the impact there?

Q: Jainism. All the different sects within Islam—Shia, Sunni, Sufi. The different legal schools of Islam all come into play.

CLEVERLEY: I used to do a lecture called “A Dummy’s Guide to the American Mind.” I gave the lecture in different countries, in Finland and Greece, and even in Vladivostok. I had three particular aspects of the American mind or American culture that foreigners don’t often get, and one of them was religion. Religion has traditionally played a very big part not just in American society, but in American politics. It still does play a big role in politics. Most foreigners never get that. They don’t see that. So, even understanding ourselves as a people, the Americans, you can’t overlook the role organized religion plays in so many different parts of our society, our policy, our attitudes, Americanisms. I took a class on Modern Europe at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] when I was at the Kennedy School. It started with religion. The professor had written a book about the *Red* and the *Black* that was about France and the role Catholicism unceasingly has played, for better or worse.

Q: Yeah. I had somebody at FSI, a young person who had been brought in to head a political tradecraft they have had never practiced, and told me with great pride that she had no interest in a particularly difficult and seminal article that—this was shortly after 9/11 when I was in the counterterrorism office—that someone had given me and asked me to get translated because they felt that the State Department needed to understand it. And I sent it over to FSI for use and was told that, “No, this was—it invoked religion too much because about every other was, you know, ‘if Allah wills it,’ or ‘in the name of Allah, the standard Arabic invocations. And told me with great pride that they had never taught anything about Protestantism, or Catholicism with regards to Ireland and North Ireland, and I found that rather stunning.

CLEVERLEY: Well, that is telling, you know. I don’t know how they could be so dead headed. Well, anyway, let me just sum up my tour in Athens so we can be moving forward. My last year there, I was nominated for the Department’s *DCM of the Year Award*. Ambassadors Tom Miller and Eric Edelman jointly nominated me for it, and I was runner-up for the award. I felt I had worked hard on a broad front, and it gave me satisfaction that it was recognized.

As I finished the assignment, I knew that Athens was my penultimate tour. I was coming to the end of my career, and I faced mandatory retirement after my next assignment. I felt a lot of fulfillment. I felt there were some big lingering issues resolved, like something as simple, or as complicated, as a parking lot behind the embassy, or a SOFA Agreement. So, I had a sense of satisfaction, but I was also tired, fatigued, and I started to develop some health issues that I never had before.

Writing a Bestseller

And perhaps, I could just digress for a minute into something that was important at the moment I was leaving Athens. While serving as DCM in Helsinki and Athens I had a hobby. Maybe “passion” is a better word for it. As DCM I worked hard, and our social life was usually more work than relaxation. All work and no play can make a rather dull DCM. A hobby, or passion, was something I welcomed.

It started in Helsinki when I read an article about a Finnish American soldier who was famous in Finnish war history. He also became a legend among the American Green Berets. In the book and movie, *The Green Berets*, the first chapter was about him. His name was Larry Thorne (“Lauri Törni,” in Finland). Thorne was a soldier in both Finland during World War II and in the United States Army during the Cold War and Vietnam. When I read his story, I was quite fascinated and decided I would start researching him as a hobby. As DCM in Helsinki, I didn't have a lot of free time to research anything, so I got up at five o'clock in the morning to work for maybe an hour and a half.

At some point, I decided I should write a book about Thorne because I had a rather unique perspective on him as a Finn and an American. A lot had been written about him in Finland but not as much in the United States. So, I started out on this massive project, done in my meager spare time, usually in the early morning hours. At first it was a hobby, then it became an obsession, and finally it was a burden. It is something I did every time I had leave. When we were in South Africa at our timeshare on leave for two weeks, I spent much of the time writing and working on it.

Anyway, during my last months in Athens, we were invited one night to a dinner party at the Finnish Ambassador's residence. My dinner company was a woman who it turned out was an editor for Finland's largest publishing company. When somewhere during the conversation she found out that I had served in Finland, I said that I had been working on this book for a few years. She knew who he was and got very interested about the idea, saying she might like to publish it in Finland when it was done. So, I kept in touch with her and stayed at work on my writing. When I finished the assignment in Athens, I had a draft ready and sent it off to her.

On another occasion, during one of my farewell dinners, I sat next to a man in Greece whom I knew, a Greek businessman with many endeavors. I didn't know when we were first chatting but soon found out that one of them was publishing. At some point we were talking about Thorne and my project, and he said, “I would like to publish that book.” I went through the State Department's required clearance process for manuscripts written by active-duty officers, and as it turned out, the year I left Athens, the Finnish company published it in Helsinki, and the Greek company published it in Athens. The Finnish publisher translated it into Finnish. The Greek company used the English text. The Greeks are broadly fluent in English, and it was less expensive to avoid translation. So, it came out in both English and Finnish in October 2003.

A few months after I left Athens, I flew from Rome one weekend for a book opening in Athens and spent another weekend in Finland for the launch there. The book in Finland became an instant best-seller, eventually going through twelve printings or more, one of

the bestselling war histories in the Finnish language. The Swedish military history book club, associated with Sweden's military academy, published it too, as their best-selling book for the year. The book came out in about five different languages during the next several years. It was a hobby and a passion that created a different kind of fulfillment during those intense professional years.

Q: Wow. How wonderful! And as a junior officer, something that you had not even been able to imagine.

CLEVERLEY: No, I never imagined. I never even imagined writing a book or something that can be successful.

Diplomacy and Elitism

Q: There is a lot of condemnation and punditry, and frankly, empty blather in the media today criticizing our Foreign Service for elitism. Is it possible for diplomacy to ever not be elite? Elitism and elitist are two different things but what I'm trying to get at is that difference. Can diplomacy ever be purely democratic? Small 'd'.

CLEVERLEY: Well, first, I think that the foreign service decades ago removed itself from claims of elitism with the implementation of the competitive foreign service entry examination process. In that world, I would attack the premise of elitism being inherently wrong. I believe one of the secrets of the American dream, the American experiment, was the idea of meritocracy. Whatever success I ever had was not from being part of a noble class. Nor do many billionaires get there because of their class or economic circumstances. One can become a professor no matter what one's humble beginnings. Or a public servant with a title may come from a humble worker's family. It was wonderful that we created universities like Stanford, Princeton, Harvard, and so on. Some of our universities are the best in the world. If somebody is lucky enough to get into them, we should not criticize them for being elitist because they attended a good school on the way to succeeding in society.

Q: Yeah, well, and let us also remind history, those were initially religious. And then private but the United States government created land grant universities that covered most of the country.

CLEVERLEY: That's right and there is nothing wrong with going to, you know, Idaho State University. If you need or want an education, it can be within reach.

Q: Michigan. I mean, they are all over the place. You can get a Harvard education at Michigan. At Harvard, it is unavoidable. In Michigan, you may, it is so much bigger and it is so much more diverse. You may have to look for it or pursue it, and maybe you don't even know what it is, but, you know, it is there. The quality, the same quality.

CLEVERLEY: I was fortunate to earn a Master of Public Administration from Harvard, but I also graduated from a small two-year junior college in a wind-swept high valley in

Idaho and later graduated from Brigham Young University, a large school in the mountains of the American West. When I came into the Foreign Service, Brigham Young wasn't producing many Foreign Service officers, but that has changed. And there was no reason why it shouldn't change. At Brigham Young there are so many returned missionaries who come back with a foreign experience and thorough fluency in a foreign language. You would think it should be a breeding ground for the Foreign Service. And it has become that.

So, there is nothing wrong with going to any university. What is wrong is to belittle someone because they happen to be smart, or they happen to go to university, or they happen to succeed. That is to me un-American. That is against the whole concept of America as a melting pot where the best can rise to the top. In fact, that is why most people from the very beginning migrated to America, to find opportunities not stymied by tradition or societal rigidity, and they tried to rise as high as their talents and merits could take them.

And democracy: we often appear to have moved democracy into a new realm over the last twenty or thirty years, where it seems to mean that everybody should have the same. You know, frankly, I don't want a doctor who didn't go to medical school. So, you don't say that anyone who wants to be a doctor can be one. We have certain standards that pertain to the requirements of a profession. When you are talking about diplomacy and the Foreign Service, you know that American diplomats daily go up against the very best, the most educated people in the societies that they interact with. And you want to have the very best to do that effectively. Especially as Americans, who for better or worse, need to implement the foreign affairs of the world's richest and most powerful country.

Q: Yeah, yeah, no. People try to make so much of diplomacy and to my mind negotiations are quite simple. It starts with truth, which is the building for trust. And then, next is, and you never promise to do something that you can't or will not follow through on because that is also having to do with trust, meaning reliability. And ultimately, there is some human bond, whether you agree or not, that trust enables a new area of heretofore impossible agreement?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I agree with all of this.

Q: And it is usually mutual education. You learn something from them, they learn something from you. You are trustworthy. That is what enables you to get to yes. Not all the fancy games and theories and nonsense that goes on in the market.

CLEVERLEY: That's right. Ultimately, I don't think that the icons of democracy had in mind anything to do with creating a least common denominator. I think democracy, the core idea behind democracy, was to create a meritocracy where people from any background could succeed. Not just because they existed, but because of what they did. One person, one vote in the political marketplace, but with open doors where anyone with ability is never held back in the economic and social marketplaces. Look at Alexander Hamilton, if you wish, or Benjamin Franklin, or John Adams. Abraham Lincoln. Humble

beginnings, but don't they form a valuable elite group in America's past? Should we criticize them for being the elites of their times, or respect them for rising as a product of our democracy?

Q: Yeah, yeah. Interesting commentary. You said that you wanted to address another reality that was rapidly changing diplomacy, challenging the State Department and challenging you particularly, as a DCM, as an institutional manager, developer and leader. And that was the digital revolution, the information revolution, IT.

Diplomacy and Information Technology

CLEVERLEY: I was in the field most of the years IT was developed and implemented in the State Department. The theme that characterized IT in the Department throughout my career in embassies was, "too little, too late." It seemed to me that the State Department was always behind. It was always trying to catch up. This was true in software, what software we were using; hardware, getting machines on people's desks; and in training, getting people literate and up to speed. It was all blamed on the State Department's budget, but IT's sad history in the State Department was more than that. A conceptual development that foresaw IT's potential and role in State Department operations was slow and faulty. It was only when General Colin Powell, someone from a completely different corporate culture, became secretary in the beginning of the 2000s that the momentum of providing the department and missions adequate IT support picked up.

Then and now, I thought the reason for this was three-fold. One was personnel, another was budget, and the third was attitude and creativity, which are kind of intangible but nevertheless, really important in the field of information technology. I didn't really feel, for example, that our IT sections were becoming professional until I was in Athens the second time. State's IT revolution started on the basis of earlier forms of communication. We had communicators who encoded material and then transmitted it back to the Department or to other embassies. And that was a different type of thing than running a word processing network.

Of course, conceptually, those two functions began to merge over time. But initially, they were different. IT was something new, perhaps at State radically different from past ways of communicating than in the private sector. So, you had to transform the personnel who did this type of thing into a group with new and different skills. And quite often, that just entailed letting the old people finish up and retire and bringing in new people trained in information techniques. Sometimes, it depended a lot on just how active an existing communicator was intellectually, and how quickly they wanted to transform themselves. And there were a lot of them who really didn't do that very well. I'm not criticizing the many great communicators I knew and worked with throughout my career. They were just caught in the bind of a revolution.

Q: Give us a timeframe for that—that "I'm stuck with the old", the challenge of transforming the former into a whole new world animal and skill set, ultimately, as you

went from the 20th century into the 21st. And the people who were legacies from the 20th century, give us a timeframe for what you are talking about.

CLEVERLEY: When I was in Helsinki the first time, in 1982, we got our first fax machine. And then we got a word processor. We had one word processor for the whole embassy and the question a lot of people had, including myself, was what is the difference between a word processor and a fax machine? And email, we didn't really understand at all. What was the difference between email and fax? And so, this transformation was starting right there. This was a new form of communication people had not encountered before.

Q: Would you put the Xerox machine also in that? Add that to that trio for that period? Because there were many people who believed that the wall came down because of the fax and the Xerox.

CLEVERLEY: Photocopying had come in a little earlier. I know in '78, and '79 we were xeroxing loads and loads of stuff in the EUR front office, and it came naturally. People were quite comfortable with copying. What was hard, though, was communicating in a completely new way. And it wasn't just the people who were communicators, it was also our office staff and officers. I know my office assistant, when she saw the first word processor, said, "I'm never going to do that, ever. That's not something I will ever do." She listened to a machine, you know, a dictating machine. And she would type. I must add here that overall, our secretaries were very capable people who saved me from embarrassment a hundred times. They were all women.

Q: She was a secretary who took shorthand? Steno?

CLEVERLEY: She listened to a machine, you know, a dictating machine. And she would type.

Q: Could she improve your first drafts?

CLEVERLEY: No. My first drafts, I usually did. I didn't give anything to her that wasn't already pretty much ready. I would do my first draft and my second draft myself.

Q: Because in my experience, the secretaries could proof the young officer's material and save them from much embarrassment. That is how well they commanded English and could write it, as well as take eighty words per minute typing or steno.

CLEVERLEY: Well, yes, I take your point. In this case, her native language was not English. And the answer to your question, in any case, may have had more to do with me than her. I consciously improved the style of my drafts as I went from one to the next.

We had to get a paradigm in our heads that diverged significantly from the previous paradigm, and that was difficult for everyone. But the changeover was starting in the early '80s as we started to see the possibilities of a fax machine and a word processor.

When I got to London a couple of years later, we had one word processor in our unit, and we shared it. There were three officers using it. We didn't bother our secretary with our drafts until they were ready to transmit. She was already serving quite a few different people, and in particular, the head of the unit who had his own set of requirements. So, we did our own drafts and pretty much finished them without ever giving them to a secretary. That was only like three years later, and already a big change.

It was not just a scarcity of machines that plagued us. Concepts behind using the technology were still very primitive. One day in London, for example, I was working on a fairly long report that I needed to get back to Washington. Right in the middle, the screen went blank, and I lost everything that I had done. This was a disadvantage of doing it on a word processor because I didn't have a hard copy. What had happened was that one of the communicators had hit the plug connecting the computer to the wall. It unplugged the computer, and that meant that everybody in the embassy working on a machine that day lost their work.

Obviously, there was not yet an appreciation of what the risks were. What were the risks if you are going to connect an embassy into a network? What type of vulnerabilities do you have, and how do you protect against those vulnerabilities? It was still a concept that was developing even in the mid-80s. And then we went into the '90s when you started getting machines on your own desk.

Q: And the machines were commercial machines, or were they proprietary? Wang.

CLEVERLEY: The first machines were Wang with Wang software for word processing. Why Wang? Maybe only someone then in IT procurement might explain, but it was certainly a curious choice. I got my first personal desktop while at Harvard, before coming to London to find the Wang in our unit. Mine was an Atari with limited capacity, maybe a 64k memory, but its word processor was equal or superior to the Wang's in many ways. IBM PCs and the Apple II were already available then. But the Department chose to outfit with Wangs, and I have always wondered how much per Wang the Department spent then. My guess is that it was still unclear in the Department conceptually where the IT market was headed and what was around the corner still, or actually available.

After the Wang software, the department moved to WordPerfect. We started receiving WordPerfect, I believe, near the end of my first tour in Athens, about 1993. It was really popular in the United States but had already started fading into the background as Microsoft came forward with its Office suite of things like Word. Finally, State switched to Word.

In my experience, there was not really adequate training for that generation of officers and secretaries. A lot of the training had to be done on our own. I never had a class on using a computer. It was in London where I started using it professionally. There was an office downstairs with a word processor and a manual, and you could go down and teach yourself how to do it if you wanted. And that's how I learned to use the machine, learning

by doing. Somewhat belatedly there were classes in some embassies, but how did you etch out time for classes was always my problem.

Q: Was that, in essence, the most likely and most effective way to be doing it? Or was that an excuse for abject lack of responsibility at the top leadership level?

CLEVERLEY: The Department's top leadership just didn't understand how crucial IT was going to be for our work. If they had, if it was going to be important, they would have trained people to use it. And if you are going to train people to use it, then you would have had classes with good teachers who really knew what they were doing. The first computer class I was invited to was while I was on my first tour in Athens, about 1990. That was five years after I taught myself word processing on the WANG in London and my Atari at home.

Q: And that was in addition to the money that you were going to have to expend for hardware that would only last, at most, three to five years.

CLEVERLEY: Nobody had a budget line. As a section chief, I had to run after resources. We tried to convince the communications section that we in the economic section really needed our own machines. These were all classified machines. One system. Nobody even dreamed of access to the internet, let alone... well, most people didn't even know what the internet could do.

Q: Give us the timeframe for that. Where were you and what was the timeframe?

CLEVERLEY: It was perhaps during my first DCM-ship in Helsinki, 1996, when people started thinking about using the internet in the office. Ambassador Eric Edelman was often in his office at 6:00 AM browsing world news providers to be completely up to speed on the latest. In Pretoria, before that, I had my own PC at home, this time much advanced over the earlier Atari, and used it at home to access the internet through a CompuServe dial-up connection. I didn't know how to use it very well. And of course, what it offered was still somewhat limited. But it was later in the Stability Pact office in 1999 when I actually had a machine that could switch over from un-class to class and use the internet if I wanted to. That was fairly late.

Q: It was post Colin Powell.

CLEVERLEY: This was just before Colin Powell. So, we were always chasing. I first tried to convince the communication section that we needed a machine, and of course, they were sympathetic. But they only had so many machines, and they did not set the budget for this. And I went to the DCM saying we needed to have more machines. It was about 2001, when Colin Powell became secretary of state and greater emphasis and resources were placed on IT.

Throw into all this the advent of smartphones. Blackberries, a case in point, were never easily available during the years before I retired in 2006. Their impact on diplomacy had

tremendous potential, but the Department was very slow in realizing that well enough, let alone getting them to users.

Q: OES [Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs] was the first bureau to have the black box, after Bonnie Cohen, the under secretary for management got one for her office. Because we had a secret tea line that everybody had forgotten about. It had been there since 1992 and everybody had forgotten about it and didn't know what to do with it because they didn't know what it meant and what it could do. And so, OES got the first black boxes in the Department in 1998 roughly, 1997-1998.

DRL [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor] had to go to a foundation in order to purchase forty internet machines, forty PCs [personal computers] that could handle the unclassified internet, because there was no money in the Department of State. Notwithstanding, the seventy-two unfunded mandates from Congress that DRL communicate and keep abreast of humanitarian NGOs and human rights NGOs better than they had been doing.

It was Colin Powell who got you black boxes and your PC machines at the embassy.

CLEVERLEY: So, you were chasing resources in the Department, too. Then there was another problem which I saw as a DCM: there was never enough initiative and creativity in the IT operations. There were a lot of things that could be done even with the technology we had if it were used right. But many things escaped the imagination of the people who managed it. For example, I may have mentioned earlier that when I was DCM in Helsinki, I was the first one to suggest to our IT officer that Outlook could be a great asset to the embassy sections, particularly our protocol section that was doing thousands of invitations all of the time and trying to keep track of thousands of contacts in various ways. I also wanted to have a database of my own, just for my own set of contacts. I told the protocol assistant that I would like her to create a database of our contacts on the computer. This was something new, and it was, again, the late '90s. It was something I am sure was already old stuff in the private sector.

Q: But we were still using rolodexes.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, we were, actually, surprisingly. Contact management was something crucial for the embassy's executive function. In the embassy, the protocol office could immensely benefit from automated contact and invitation lists. The Department, then, did not provide one, but we had Outlook, and even its relatively simple database functions could serve the purpose. When I was DCM in Athens, I also raised the issue with the protocol office. I wanted to make sure they had all of our contacts in a computerized database, but in addition I wanted them to have an invitation capability so they didn't have to make 1,000 or 2,000 personalized invitations for the 4th of July by hand, like they had been doing in the past.

In both Helsinki and Athens, I asked the IT people to develop over the short term something based on the Outlook capability we already had. The Athens protocol assistant

went to a European regional conference and was told that the Department was developing protocol software that would be provided sometime in the future. So, there was a hesitancy on her and our IT unit's part to do a lot of work to come up with our own protocol capability.

The Department finally did bring out protocol software that had many more capabilities than Outlook, but we ended up waiting a long time for it. And then it was complicated and hard for people to learn how to use, whereas going with Outlook, if we had done that, could have given us essentially the same result and more easily so. I rarely felt that our IT operations were close enough to the end-users, that they really knew what would benefit the end-user most. Perhaps that was not necessarily always the fault of the IT people. It was also the fault of the section chiefs or the DCMs who were not channeling into the IT people what we really needed.

Q: Well, any good program or programmer should be driven by the end-user, and that was an alien concept at the Department of State because of stovepipes, because leaders frankly didn't care, because they didn't use that stuff.

CLEVERLEY: They didn't. And for my generation, you know, I didn't ever take computer science classes when I was in the sixth grade.

Q: Yeah. You weren't a native.

CLEVERLEY: I didn't grow up with it, but I was quick to want to learn to use it. I was always inquisitive about gadgets, and I was doing economic work where you could get benefits from things like this. But there were many people in my generation in the Foreign Service who were totally intimidated by IT. They hadn't had time, or they didn't take the initiative to go to some office somewhere in the building to teach themselves how to do it. That continued throughout my career. There were a lot of people my age who never learned well.

Q: Yeah. When I was a little girl, I learned how to sew. And then I discovered that if you know how to sew, you have to make your own clothes. So, I forgot how to sew. And I never, I just couldn't, I mean, I couldn't do it. So, guess what? I never had to make my own clothes again. Sometime, rather, the clothes got bought.

Would you care to comment now with even more perspective and experience on the degree to which, the ways in which the digital revolution is impacting and is going to affect the very essence of what we used to call diplomacy, which was essentially a 19th century, highly personalized, networked profession? Up until this hit? Is the diplomacy that your generation came in with and were taught going to survive? How is it going to be different? How is it already different? Is that a good thing? Is it a bad thing? Any observations you have halfway through the revolution? Because we are only still very much at the beginning of it, frankly. AI [artificial intelligence] has not gotten into the game yet.

IT and Diplomacy: the Dark Side

CLEVERLEY: Looking at ITs present and future role in diplomacy, there are definitely pros and cons. I mean, clearly IT will assist the overall diplomatic process. The need for diplomacy and the objective of diplomacy will probably always be there, but the way of doing it may change, for the better or worse.

Every coin has two sides, of course. Let's take demarches, for example – diplomatically making points to a host government to seek its agreement and support. You can easily conceive of a day when AI could engage your counterparts (or their robots) to make your arguments for you. I have heard that today some officers simply fax or email their talking points over to the ministry, something that might primitively presage my hypothetical AI diplomacy. Such an engagement seems to presume that if we have the best or smartest arguments, we control the room, a presumption that even today seems to underlie too much of American diplomacy.

However, as I mentioned earlier, that assumption rarely helped us achieve our objectives in our relations with foreign countries, something that usually required some type of personal interaction or relationship. Personal relations were a key ingredient in getting our way in diplomacy. I can't see a robot shaking hands with my guests, or sitting at the head of the table over lunch or dinner with my best contacts.

Another example: I left the State Department just as we were getting Blackberrys so that people could have their email with them, even in the middle of a meeting. In a plenary in Rome, for example, I was able on a couple of occasions to correspond with the desk through email about an issue under discussion for which I wanted some immediate input. Something like this did not happen very often because it was very late in my tour in Rome that I got a Blackberry. But it was a possibility to get real time input into an ongoing diplomatic discussion. I considered that to be of some value and potential.

On the other hand, I see what my foreign service officer son is going through with email now, twenty years later. It seems to me that it has become almost unbearable for many reasons, but principally because of the volume. The total number of emails they will get over the course of the day is incredible. You have little time to do analytical thinking or analytical reporting because you are operational virtually 24/7 going through the email. Some of the messages are important, and many are marginal. You are put down as a cc, but it still shows up on your screen. You have to determine its importance before you delete it. Another thing, in my view an unfair labor practice, is that emails seeking input or giving instructions arrive at any time during the day or night and often expect a quick turnaround. So, you never have free time. My son never has total down time.

Q: You never have a life of your own.

CLEVERLEY: You don't, at night, on the weekends, when you are on leave. He is getting emails and they are giving instructions or asking for input as if it were the middle of a

workday. That, I think, is totally unconscionable and counterproductive, something that should not exist.

Q: In the 1920s, every single foreign service officer had a secretary or a personal assistant. Because you started off as being that person, a third secretary to a higher-ranked person. It was essentially a way of curating information flow to the more senior officers through the third, second and first secretary ranks, up to the titled ranks. What you are describing now is an uncurated, information chaos, 24/7, unrelenting and never less demanding. Does that provoke any thoughts or speculation on your part as to the sustainability of where we are now?

CLEVERLEY: I don't think this is sustainable. Perhaps, because of that, it will be corrected with time. But it reminds me in a sense of what role IT had in the Department, on the more senior levels, before Colin Powell. If you want to stop this practice, it is stoppable to a great extent simply by making it totally clear, not just sort of quasi-clear, that it is not the way we do business in the State Department. It has to come from the top floor. I just think that even Foreign Service Officers who are on the seventh floor and in the most senior career positions are not always willing to establish a clear management environment. They don't consider it important enough to go through the pains of what that might require.

Someone who might have been a great ambassador somewhere necessarily might not make a good under secretary or deputy secretary for management. That is where top career officers might end up. But there has to be more input from those heights. I get it that on the senior-most political levels, you don't find a Colin Powell every day. You get appointees who are necessarily engaged in the highest level of diplomacy.

I would assume that their thinking is that more junior career people are going to take care of the career and workplace issues. It is their job to be thinking this through. But if we are talking about IT, it certainly did not happen well enough until Colin Powell came. And in this case, every desk officer is under their own pressures to come up with something at a certain time. And it doesn't matter if there is a six or ten-hour time difference between the field and Washington, they want an answer. There has to be some new systemic institutional understanding.

Q: Are you talking about a new culture? A new corporate culture?

CLEVERLEY: An improved one.

Q: What would be the first two steps you would take in that direction?

CLEVERLEY: Well, off the top of my head, without having a few weeks to think this through, the step I probably would take from a seventh-floor office suite would be to bring in all assistant secretaries to launch a thrust in this regard and to explain the parameters of this thrust. I would also want input from the people who are closest to the desks where much of the tasking originates usually. I suspect that on the assistant

secretary level there is a tendency to diminish the size of the problem in light of the huge issues that in their minds dominate their jobs. That tendency needs a new perspective.

Next would be to establish a think process aimed at a department plan and approach. It's not like there are no precedents for this. In my time, there were parameters for initiating "night action" cables, for example. There isn't a reason why something similar might not be done in this case. There has to be an improved culture, a better way of thinking about how we do our work. It is not just giving a rule, but you have to change the way people do things, the way they think about things. It should start on the country and functional desks. Maybe they're getting nicked and dined at home, too, but at least their 24-hour schedule is the same as Washington's. It makes it more complicated if you are on a six-hour time difference.

Q: Does your son's generation have any instinct for self-organizing and pushing up these kinds of demands and answers toward the top? The way that happened in the '70s that resulted in a new Foreign Service Act? Or are they just simply overwhelmed?

CLEVERLEY: I get the impression that they are overwhelmed.

Q: Yeah. Well, you have provided rich grist for future historians. Thank you. Let us, how are we doing? Let us get you to Rome in the next five minutes or so, and then on Friday, we will do your Rome tour and start a close out. If you need another one, another session to do that, that will certainly be available. But does that make sense?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, it does.

US Mission to the UN, Rome, Italy July 2003-April 2006

Q: How did you get from Athens to Rome?

CLEVERLEY: As I got towards the end of the Athens assignment, I looked at what might be available for my next one. While in Helsinki and Athens, I had been included on some shortlists for ambassador. Like I said, I wasn't sure how much I wanted to do that. Europe was an environment I felt I knew, and I thought that I preferred more to be DCM in Athens than an ambassador in Lesotho. There were very few career ambassadorships in Europe, and I knew that I wasn't likely to be offered one of them. The new ambassador to Ukraine called me and asked if I would like to go to Ukraine as DCM. I turned him down. (In retrospect, that probably was a good decision.)

But there was a DCM position open in Rome at the multilateral mission. In Rome, there were three missions: the bilateral mission; the mission to the Holy See, the Vatican; and the mission to the UN [United Nations] agencies in Rome. That was the mission where I bid on the DCM position. I applied for the job and ended up in Rome in the summer of 2003.

Rome had a large UN and international organization presence: the Food and Agriculture Organization, [FAO], the largest UN specialized agency; the World Food Programme [WFP], the largest UN fund; and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, a rather small but important organization in the agricultural development area.

Our mission represented the United States in three small international organizations in addition to those. They were the International Development Law Organization, the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law, and the International Center for the Study and Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property. For these, our involvement was relatively small and entailed overseeing and contributing to the budgets.

Q: Is the Sinai multilateral force still done out of Rome? Or does that even still exist?

CLEVERLEY: If it was there, I was not aware of it. It was not covered by our mission.

The UN Vacuum in State Support

The thrust of the mission was towards FAO and the World Food Programme because we were channeling generous sums of money into both of those organizations. The FAO, for example, had two budgets. One was an assessed budget and the second one was a voluntary contribution budget. In 2003, when I got there, the assessed budget was about \$800 million. And of that \$800 million, twenty-two percent was from the United States. Japan was number two. I think either Germany or the European Union was after that. Twenty-two percent of \$800 million was a sizable contribution for an international organization.

The World Food Programme was the largest fund in the UN system, and the United States contributed that year about \$1.5 billion in money and products to World Food Programme. That was just over fifty percent of the budget. In FAO we were the largest donor with over one-fifth of the budget.

The mission in Rome coordinated U.S. interests within these UN organizations. What were Washington's interests? One important reason we were giving so much money and food to WFP was because it was a way of channeling surplus American agricultural products into parts of the world where there were hungry people. USAID was very much engaged in this as was USDA. Both agencies had offices headed by senior officers based in our mission. USDA tended to take much of the lead on FAO matters; USAID led on WFP. State had five officers, if you include the ambassador and DCM, following the issues as well as a junior PA officer.

In Washington, there was ample interagency interest and support on the working level for our mission. But on the more senior level, the Department was not happy with FAO. Washington considered FAO large and wasteful, and was not fond of its director general, who had somehow finagled a second term for six years. To express our dissatisfaction, we pushed hard to get member states to agree to three successive zero nominal growth

budgets during the years just before I got there. In real terms this meant a diminished budget.

On the State Department policy level, there seemed to be only two real interests in the Food and Agriculture Organization. One of them was the budget and the other one was procuring more UN jobs for American citizens. Neither of these made up a substantive or real policy. Both were simply administrative and managerial. The issues that FAO was trying to accomplish, their objectives, were for the most part overlooked at least on the senior level at the State Department. To give you an idea, we had no senior State visitors in the three years I was there. No senior DAS or above from the Bureau of International Organizations. The desk and office were great in supporting us, but we were always swimming against the current as far as the senior level was concerned. Overall, there just wasn't great interest within the Bush administration in the United Nations.

Today, we tend to forget how clumsy the Bush Administration was in most things pertaining to foreign affairs because we've had even more dismal days since then. But this was not a very enlightened group of people who oversaw our participation in the UN. If we held the budget to zero real growth, and if we somehow got a few more jobs for Americans, then that was all the senior level at State seemed to want.

USDA certainly had a higher level of interest in FAO, and of course USAID was heavily involved in ensuring effective WFP operations that used the \$1.5 billion dollars of our funding. We would see the administrator of USAID in Rome and we had the under secretary from USDA several times. But that was not the case with State.

Q: How did the creation under the Bush administration, the creation of the Millennium Challenge Fund, which was at that time designed hopefully to replace AID but never did because of Afghanistan, because AID was the only tool we had when that sort of field expertise and activity and funding channels, frankly, were proved to be essential in Afghanistan. But did the Millennium Challenge creation impact your function at all? Or impact AID at that time?

CLEVERLEY: From where I sat, the Millennium Challenge Fund, which was still in its infancy stage when I got to Rome, did not have a lot of visibility. On the senior level at the State Department, in particular, it gave us a framework where we could look at what objectives we might have for our foreign assistance. But it did not on a day-to-day basis affect the way we did things in Rome.

Ambassador Tony Hall

Our ambassador was Tony Hall. Tony Hall was an interesting individual. He had spent twenty-three years as a Democrat in Congress when he was appointed by George Bush to be ambassador to the UN missions in Rome. It was unusual for a Republican Administration to appoint a Democrat to an ambassadorship.

Q: Was it unusual for a Republican to appoint a Democrat to such a frankly cushy post? Substance aside, Rome was always up there with Paris and London.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, it was. Rome was a cushy post, a place where earlier they had put people like George McGovern. Tony was from Dayton, Ohio, and very popular among his constituents. By appointing him to this job, of course, it opened up a new slot in Ohio that maybe the Republicans could fill. They probably saw some possible political mileage. But George Bush was a religious man, and so was Tony. They seemed to hit it off well together.

Often members of Congress have a theme set of issues. Tony's theme was world hunger, and he had been on that theme for years. He even had done a hunger strike in Congress, trying to get more American attention for the hungry of the world. So, he was a conviction person, and hunger was his conviction. Tony was also prominent in The Family. Do you know what that was?

Q: I do know about it but tell our readers, ten years, twenty years hence.

CLEVERLEY: The Family was a religious group that claimed they were not an organized religious organization. But there was some form of organization inside it that attracted the elite of the American political system, not just members of the administration, but many members of Congress, and even members of the Supreme Court. They were very influential in Washington. For example, they were behind the National Prayer Breakfast every year. They were also secretive with a low-profile façade. I never heard Tony use that term, "The Family," ever, but I heard it from others around him.

What The Family were trying to do was promote religious values, particularly Christian values, among the senior leadership of the United States and foreign countries. Tony was a leader in the movement, and George Bush, who apparently had had a wild youth, had essentially been brought to religion by someone who was in The Family. And although Bush never joined as an active player, he was sympathetic to it. Perhaps that may have had something to do also with the Bush administration's willingness to appoint Tony to Rome. Tony wanted to alleviate world hunger and the suffering he had seen in Ethiopia through many visits there. By being at the point of U.S. policy on world hunger, he hoped to make a difference in a way he could not do in Congress.

Tony Hall, however, carried a tremendous amount of The Family baggage with him. Over the course of the time I was DCM for him, there was a continuous stream of people associated with The Family – congressional representatives and their spouses, sometimes separately, Mrs. Gingrich, and others – moving through Rome, our mission, and the residence. They often had an agenda. As did Tony himself, which, unfortunately, was not necessarily the agenda of the United States government or the agenda of the United States Mission. But it was his mission in life and seemed to be his number one priority. We will come back to that in a minute, but first, maybe I should just say how that mission was structured.

Q: Yeah, I think that would be helpful. Also, just note to history. Subsequently, there has been a rather fulsome documentary produced on The Family. So, there is a lengthy documentary film out there, somewhere. It has been on Netflix.

CLEVERLEY: And Tony appears in it at one point. It was done after he was no longer ambassador. Interviewing him for the film tells how influential he was in The Family. It was not a totally favorable documentary and didn't cast them in a very nice light.

The Mission in Rome

Our mission was not located at the United States bilateral mission to Italy, but on *Piazza del Popolo*, maybe a mile or two away from the bilateral embassy. It was a rented space in an office building. There were three components in the mission. USAID and FAS from USDA had offices. And then there was the State component that included two mid-level officers, a junior public affairs officer, and myself. One of them was a management officer, but the bilateral mission provided overall management support for us as well as for the mission to the Holy See.

Q: Even better.

CLEVERLEY: In some ways, the DCM position was good from my perspective because I didn't have to get so much into the nitty gritty of management functions as I had in previous DCM jobs. But in other ways, it was not the best because the bilateral mission would obviously tend to consciously, or unconsciously, take care of its own. We would have to sometimes keep ringing the bell in order to get attention for our own management issues. But overall, the bilateral mission was supportive almost always. I never had deep problems with a lack of support, although sometimes it was slower than I was used to.

The USAID component had an O1 officer, who was an experienced older officer with sympathies toward The Family. He was close, in a religious sense, to Tony Hall. It also included locally hired Americans and Italians. The Foreign Agricultural Service was headed by a senior foreign service officer, and included a locally hired American citizen. The executive office had two locally hired American office managers, the ambassador, a special assistant Tony Hall had brought with him, and me, as DCM. The management officer was an O2 level. The political economic officer was an O1 rank. We had several management interns over the time I was there.

Q: Was it a political econ or just straight political?

CLEVERLEY: I can't recall what the job was on the books, but the work was certainly both. In substance, it was really political econ.

Q: As though, at that level, you can separate the two. That is one of the many curiosities left over from the 20th century.

CLEVERLEY: Well, yes, absolutely. The ambassador had a designated slot for either an office management specialist or a special assistant. He chose to bring an assistant from outside State who was very networked into The Family. He worked under a State umbrella but was dedicated to Tony Hall. He was a good person, but young and very inexperienced, at least in his State Department responsibilities.

Q: But from The Family, with The Family agenda.

CLEVERLEY: Absolutely, that's what he was and did. When I arrived, the ambassador had a local hire Italian secretary. This did not make for good management, and I replaced her fairly early on for an American local hire and succeeded in getting authorization for another locally hired American to work mainly for me and the State component. Both were outstanding and capable and with them we started to regain the semblance of a proper mission. I'll talk more about this later. Speaking of IT, by this point, most people were quite self-sufficient with their machines, and we didn't need as much clerical support as had been the case in the past.

Q: As in the olden days in the 20th century.

CLEVERLEY: At first, the ambassador's special assistant was for practical purposes acting as Tony's deputy. He didn't know anything about State operations, and the front office was segmented off from the rest of the mission in many ways. My predecessor had tried to deal with this issue and was unsuccessful to the point that Tony decided to ruin her career. When he wrote her evaluation, he told me afterwards more than once, he wanted to destroy her career. I don't know if he accomplished his purpose.

Q: That happened in the 20th century more than many people admitted and it continues. And eventually, it has an impact, a cumulative impact on many, many things.

CLEVERLEY: Well, definitely, it had a huge impact on the mission. The fact that I had been DCM a couple of times before benefited me a lot when I arrived. You know, I think this was my predecessor's first time as DCM. She had to climb the normal learning curve in what was an aggressive office environment. She was at a disadvantage I suspect. They made it very hard for her. As far as I could see, she had never done anything wrong. It was just that he didn't like the way she was trying to manage things and was happy to see the end of her.

A Problem with Ethics

In the meantime, the special assistant was in and out of the ambassador's office probably every hour taking care of an agenda that was meant to be invisible to me, but when I did grasp what was happening, it was often not only inconsistent with the mission but with ethics standards in the State Department.

Initially, Tony Hall appreciated my work and relied on me a lot because he knew I had a great deal of experience as a DCM, and he couldn't easily discount what I might say if he

disagreed with it. But our relationship would gradually wane. The structural problem was that he had a personal staff assistant who did his bidding, which was at least as much involved with The Family business as with the mission. For Tony, however, the two things were superimposed, essentially the same thing. The Family also sent a couple to live in Rome to support Tony with The Family matters. It became a study in ethics: what the ambassador could and could not do with official resources in supporting personal matters.

Although I approached the matter sensitively, and initially he listened and tried to understand, our regular dialogue on ethics and his need to keep me as DCM aware of where he was and what he was doing wore away at him and me. Once, he traveled to Tajikistan as an American ambassador, and didn't inform me or the post in Tajikistan. When he showed up, he called on the president of Tajikistan without the knowledge of the American ambassador there. Of course, he was doing The Family business, but in the guise of an American ambassador. He was already on his way when I found all this from his special assistant who had put the travel plans together trying to keep me unaware. I sent an email to the post, but it was awkward, obviously. Their response was like, why didn't you let us know earlier? and why didn't you know?

Problems with Mission Management

The executive office was pretty much a wasteland when I arrived. I had no office management assistant, and the ambassador's secretary was a crafty Italian hire whose loyalty was solely toward the ambassador and who did her best to keep me and the rest of the mission isolated from the ambassador. She was also essentially incompetent in her secretarial support. There were no files, no records, and no institutional history. With a few examples of his secretary's ill performance, I got the ambassador's grudging support to transfer her to a job in the bilateral mission, and we hired an American for his support and a second to support the executive office and other State elements of the mission. I trained them on State office procedures including how to set up and maintain records.

Tony would typically arrive about 10:00 am and leave shortly after 3:00 pm, often mentioning to me how surprised he was to find how easy being an ambassador was. He occasionally interfaced with other permanent representatives, but for the most part had little time for them. It remained for me to cultivate working relationships with ambassadorial-level counterparts, and several began calling me "ambassador" even though they knew I wasn't entitled to the honor. I think they understood the problems at our mission and wanted to underline that they were prepared to work with us.

It was always challenging to keep the ambassador out of trouble. And without senior Washington support, we were pretty much alone on the post management front. Things between us never repaired following an incident where he asked his secretary to arrange the shipment of a dog. The dog belonged to the couple The Family sent to Rome to provide support for Tony. Of course, they were not employees of the United States government, nor connected to the mission. The Family was rotating them back to the States, and Tony wanted our mission to support their move. When his office assistant spent almost a day dealing with their dog's shipment, our secretarial staff both came to

me to complain that this was not what they were paid to do. They were right, the matter was an ethics violation, and I told Tony it should not and could not be done. He was angry and said he always thought his staff should support him because “they loved him,” Duty or regulations should not be an impediment. Neither one of these office assistants would have ever said they loved Tony. He drove them mad. But I didn’t get into that, and simply said these things simply were not allowed in the State Department.

It wasn’t that Tony Hall was an inherently unethical person. He was a religious person and seemed to want to do right. But one of the problems he brought with him was that the ethics rules and systems within the legislative branch in the United States government, at that time in any case, were quite different from the executive branch’s rules. And what he thought he could do, and in fact did do in the legislative branch, was not consistent with what was allowed in the State Department, or anywhere else in the executive branch.

Q: Are you sure that has changed? Capitol hill was known as the plantation. It doesn't sound like you moved to a more restful stress-free job than the one you had before. Or is that a misreading or a misinterpretation?

CLEVERLEY: From the beginning, my Rome assignment was not what I expected. I thought it would be a more relaxed job. It was not, and turned out to be, let me say, one of the two most challenging jobs that I had in the Foreign Service. The first one of them was Pretoria and the other was this one. So, Rome was wonderful when you were walking down the cobblestone streets enjoying the sights, but working in this office was very frustrating and never easy.

Q: So, there is a reason that it is known as a Middle Eastern, the only Middle Eastern city without a European quarter. It up into a lot of people who think it is cushy and easy. This has been a very rich and very insightful, and I think very important interview, Mike. And we will wrap up your career and post-career observations, and then also hopefully talk about what you did when you mustered out, next time. Thanks a lot.

CLEVERLEY: That sounds good, take care.

Q: This is Stephanie Kinney and we are entering the last session of oral history interviews with Mike Cleverley on April 1, 2022, April Fool's Day. We'll assume that's not portentous. Mike, our last session related to a very challenging time and tour in Rome as the DCM [deputy chief of mission] for the US-UN Mission to Rome. You had an office in the Piazza del Popolo. And you had magnificent churches with magnificent Caravaggio paintings on either side of the view of human struggle and agony.

What additional points would you like to make and observe about that tour. And then, let's move on to what brought about retirement, how that felt, what it involved, and what life was like coming back to the United States and reentering a domestic world for the first time, exclusively, in many, many years? What did you do during retirement? And

then, some assessment, reflection, summary of where you've been and where you are now. And where are we as a country? Where our American diplomacy is, and the institutions that are central to its existence? So, a small, small menu for this morning.

The DCM's Job

CLEVERLEY: Having managed two embassies as DCM and been in many more before that, the impression I gained during my first two or three weeks in Rome was that I had just landed in a rogue mission. It was far off the path from anything I had ever before experienced. After some moments of initial bewilderment, I concluded many of the problems might be fixable, and making that happen was my overall goal through the remainder of my assignment.

Before elaborating on this, I want to outline what more specifically I was expected to do and what I did. Of course, I had the normal DCM functions: oversight, staffing, coordination especially with the bilateral mission. That part was relatively easy. A DCM often gets sandwiched between the ambassador and the other people in the mission. You have to manage up and down, and managing down was easy for me. Managing up, in Rome, had its own challenges.

As DCM, I wore another hat as the Deputy United States Permanent Representative to both the WFP and FAO. USAID wanted to be central to our interface with WFP, and I didn't play as much a role there as I did in FAO. Given the ambassador's own interests and background, he was very interested in what WFP did. When he engaged, he did it most often on WFP issues. He was always there when we needed high level presence. He was an active part of the U.S. delegation.

In FAO, however, I normally took the lead. FAO was a very large organization with its own conference and council, very much like the UN on a smaller scale. Since the ambassador himself had lesser interest in FAO than in WFP, I was usually the lead American in the discussions in that organization. As I mentioned earlier, Washington thought FAO was poorly run. It was also very dissatisfied with the secretary general, Jacques Diouf, who was from Senegal.

The Dynamics of Multilateral Diplomacy

One of the things that I learned fairly early on was the dynamics of diplomacy within the FAO. The members organized themselves in various geographical groupings, essentially the developed world and the less-developed world. The EU would coordinate as a group and then interface with the United States, Japan, and other OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development] countries. In general, there were two groups, essentially an OECD and a G77 [Group of 77] group. Within the G77, the African group was usually cohesive. The EU would take a common position, if they could reach one, and then coordinate with us and the rest of the developed countries. The EU had its own ambassador, but the members voted individually, casting one vote each. There was some diversity within the G77 grouping, but the African group had fifty-five votes and they

tended to vote together on a common position. That was a lot, over 25 percent of the votes.

The Africans were cohesive because FAO had a lot to offer them. They felt they had a common interest in the organization. The chairman of the African group was the ambassador from Zimbabwe. Initially, I thought this was a problem because there were some limitations in our relations with Zimbabwean diplomats. But I realized fairly early on that if we were going to have any influence on the African group, it had to start with her. The Middle Eastern group, of course, was also quite cohesive, but there weren't as many votes there. It was really the African vote that was important to manage.

Q: What was the EU—when I was involved in the UN in the '90s, you had this strange thing because there was an ongoing, evolving geopolitical reality. And then, there were these traditional blocs, basically, WEOG [Western European and Others Group], Western and others, as opposed to just the EU. EU had its own policy. It was very different from the United States policy, and that was very different from Canada and Japan and Australia. And yet, those differences got lumped together under WEOG and WEOG caucused together and did a lot. A lot of coordination and consensus building came out of that. Was there a WEOG at FAO or had that era passed? There was still a G77 you said, but was it just the EU and then the United States that were separate? Explain that a little bit for people because the United Nations is evolving over time, just like everybody else. But it's very slow, it is very slow to change.

CLEVERLEY: There were two groupings: the OECD and the G77 groups. Within the OECD group were the developed nations, such as Japan, Canada, the EU countries, and ourselves. Of course, the EU had a number of members who it seemed often did not share interests. It was often more difficult for us to work with the EU than the African Group.

Our ambassador was regularly absent from these discussions. In practice, it was my responsibility to develop the dialogue with the other member states. And I realized that in any dealings in the FAO, especially with G77 members, the United States was at a disadvantage. Even though we paid twenty-two percent of the bills, just being the United States meant that anything we said would be taken with a gram of skepticism. To play a credible role and be effective in the organization, we had to cultivate relationships within the G77, especially with the Africans.

Q: Can you explain that a little bit more, elaborate on that a little bit more. We paid twenty-two percent of the bills but everything we said, did was questionable.

CLEVERLEY: This was typical of its time. One reason was because of the George Bush administration's conservative orientation towards the UN, its skepticism of the UN as an instrument that promoted U.S. interests as they defined them, and its antagonism in general, towards any UN operation. I think this was essentially ideological. But it went beyond that with G77 perceptions, rightly or wrongly perceived, of America's tendency to bully to get what it wants.

Picking up on American sentiments outside the Atlantic seaboard, it wasn't ever clear what kind of a role the United States needed to play in the world. That might have been clear right after World War II when these organizations were put together, but it wasn't clear in the early 2000s. The Cold War was over in many people's minds. Again, we are talking about 2003, 2004, 2005, and the role of the United States as a leader was something that people weren't always terribly comfortable with. The thrust of the Bush administration was the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan. We were the largest donor, but still only had one vote. That rubbed the administration wrong. But instead of taking some action to see if they could do something about it, it was easier to sit back and complain.

Diplomacy and Reform

There were efforts in New York to discuss the importance of the UN, and I thought it would be useful if we did the same in Rome. The idea that someone had already floated and I picked up on very early on, was of an internal assessment. If we could do an internal assessment that would identify the weaknesses and the strengths of the organization, it could be easier to sell Washington on being more generous with the budget. And it would be a facade for the organization to work behind the scenes to actually improve its operations.

Q: Yeah. Was there an impulse for that kind of—because this is now by 2005. If you look at 1945, you are looking at a significant milestone of institutional endurance. But the world had changed a good deal in those intervening, what fifty, sixty years. Were there impulses other than in the United States in your perspective within FAO that echoed that sense of “something's got to give. Things have changed since 1945.”

CLEVERLEY: The British were very much on board with us. Diouf, however, was against it because he saw it as an attack on his leadership. It wasn't a direct attack but an attempt to deal with the weaknesses in his leadership. It became clear that if we were going to do an internal assessment, it would have to come from the members, through the governing conference and council, and not as an initiative from the organization itself. It was an issue of convincing the various country groupings that this was worthwhile. I took the lead on promoting the assessment.

In our earlier discussions, FAO would say, we don't have the money for one thing because you don't give us a sufficient budget. So, there was also a question of convincing Washington that it would be worthwhile to come up with some money to help fund the assessment. Much of my tenure in Rome was spent lobbying and negotiating with the other member states to get them to buy in. To get G77 support, I knew we had to establish credibility, and one of the ways I did that was getting people into my home. I even had the Zimbabwean as a guest. I would have lunch with them, or I would go to their offices to lobby for their support. We finally succeeded. Even the Africans, ever skeptical of American initiatives, came on board.

The Diplomacy of Relationship Building

Q: Are you saying that relationship building and diplomacy can actually work?

CLEVERLEY: Relationship building and diplomacy can actually work. What didn't work was to sit in an FAO meeting saying we think this would be helpful. They didn't believe us. We didn't have credibility. One time, the Zimbabwean ambassador said something interesting to me. "You know, the African countries would follow the U.S. lead if it would be willing to take the lead." Even though in our view in the past we thought we were taking the lead, we were, in theirs, just an antagonistic player. What she was saying to me was we had to cultivate consensus on issues, and that started by talking individually with them as equal partners. We had to take time to talk to them as colleagues.

Surprisingly, I found that many G77 permanent representatives had never been together one-on-one in an American social occasion. I invited a group of them to a Christmas party at our home. We had dinner, and afterwards as we sat around the room talking, Santa Claus knocked loudly on the patio door. The Afghanistan representative who was sitting next to it rose with a jolt. I think he thought it was a bomb. We all laughed, and he laughed too, as Santa passed out gifts. These types of moments were invaluable. We needed to do business together on a different basis than just talking at each other across the plenary hall. I found how important it was, especially in a multilateral setting, when we are dealing with countries where social interaction happens to be the way people relate to each other.

In Rome, we took advantage of the garden behind the residence the embassy provided us and chatted with our guests there during the warm Roman evenings. It was social, but it was also work. When I talked to the Zimbabwean ambassador, we started in about Zimbabwe, Rome, or the United States, but at some point, found ourselves talking about the internal FAO assessment our mission was promoting. In a formal setting, she was supposed to have a stony face, but in my garden and enjoying our friendly hospitality, she listened. That mattered to her and it mattered, I think, to so many of the others. For us, getting African buy-in for the initiative gave us over half the votes we needed in a majority count.

Q: Yeah. Did the fact that we had the money give us the sense that money was all that mattered. And as long as we paid the bill, we got to determine how things would go or how things would—how the money would be used. In other words, was money part of the insurmountable obstacle there for us, because if we hadn't had the money, we would have gone and worked and done the traditional relationship cultivation and persuasion. But did the money give us the sense that we were therefore entitled to do things our way? Was that part of the problem?

CLEVERLEY: Sometimes money was part of our own frustration, I think, because we thought we should be able to use it as leverage to get what we wanted when we were only one out of a hundred and eighty-five votes. But the problem was still deeper than that, and based on a misperception of how being the biggest, smartest, or best in the room should get us the outcome we want. We discussed this earlier.

That's not how organizations made up of different countries work. They function by having some type of a relationship that gives the countries a sense we are all together in this, not just showing up to preach. Being a really smart diplomat didn't matter nearly so much as having them over for lunch in a friendly, accepting atmosphere where we sat, empathized, and chatted, or by my going over to their office and talking to them and explaining where we were coming from. That mattered, and after that the strength of the argument mattered. And I saw that in bilateral diplomacy as much as multilateral diplomacy. Relying solely on argument, or money, doesn't work nearly as well as we would like. We should know that since we don't prevail as often as we want.

Q: It's not institutional. It's an institutional setting but it is the people and the individuals who make the decisions, who have the feelings, who have the perceptions, and who can or cannot change perceptions.

Diplomacy and the Starving

CLEVERLEY: That's right. Let me just add another thing pertaining to the substance of my work in Rome. When I first arrived, the American executive director of the World Food Program told me that I needed to travel to Africa to see efforts to assist the hungry. "After you do that," he said, "your life will never be the same."

The more I worked on WFP issues, the more I felt an urgency to do that. There were 800 million people at that time who were chronically hungry. I started thinking of taking a trip to Africa, and the ambassador encouraged it. We had a good reason to go to Africa because we were donating so much money through WFP and FAO projects there. We continually asked how our money was being used.

I made two trips to Africa. On the first, I was accompanied by my FAS colleague. We went to three countries. In a word, it was overpowering to visit families and villages that had little or no food. Many survived only by foraging the forests every morning.

Q: Yeah. Do you remember which countries you visited?

CLEVERLEY: We were in Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, we were in a very crude settlement where people were surviving on WFP food donations: soy products mainly, enriched. These people had been Black workers on White farms. One day, trucks showed up on the farms and herded these workers into the back. It was the Zimbabwean government's way of trying to get rid of White farmers. Instead of taking the workers to a place they might work, they dropped them somewhere alongside the road. The people started putting together crude shelters from whatever they could find. The village that resulted was primitive. The WFP, through NGOs [non-government organizations], started food programs including a school lunch for the children.

So many were wasting away from AIDS. We went to one woman's house, and you could tell she was dying from AIDS. She was about 30, I guessed, and she had a picture tacked

to the cardboard wall of herself when she was younger. Next to it was a hand-made sign that read, “I love those who hate me for no reason.”

Another house had two children living on their own, a boy twelve and his brother, aged six. The twelve-year old attended the school where he could get lunch. The younger one stayed home to take care of the corn plants. The WFP, through an NGO, took food to their home. Neighbors kept an eye on the boys. It was not uncommon for children to be living on their own.

We visited a village to observe an FAO program that financed instruction on how to grow crops. The woman who took us to her field with her fifty-five-year-old, single daughter, was about eighty years old. When I asked why her cornfield was doing so well, she pointed to a guy who traveled village-to-village training subsistence farmers. “We use hybrid seeds and fertilizer,” she said proudly. She sounded like an American farmer.

Q: Yeah. And they had been helped by an extension agent in effect.

CLEVERLEY: An extension agent on a bicycle who had helped them and others. We saw another village where FAO had bought treadle pumps for the village. Treadle pumps are like a step machine from the gym. Two people facing each other step up and down on either side of it. The simple machine pumps water from a source, a nearby river or out of the ground. Hoses carry the water to crops in a place that otherwise is dry. Many villages only had one treadle pump, and in this village, it was so valuable that the neighboring village had tried one night to steal it.

Another trip started with an FAO regional conference in Johannesburg where I linked up with the American delegation, headed by Eric Bost, then under secretary of Agriculture. Seija came with me at our own expense, and while I was at the conference, she was in Johannesburg. The night before our departure we ate out, and she got so sick that we had to call the hotel’s house doctor.

Whatever the doctor gave her worked, but she was very weak the next morning when we flew to Swaziland where I had arranged a program with the WFP. Some WFP people met our flight and took us to see a school lunch project. School feeding was very important in Africa for two reasons: one, it provided badly needed nourishment to children. But if you gave lunch at school, parents more readily allowed their daughters to attend. It offered an opportunity to educate girls.

The children we discovered didn’t have the sixty dollars a year needed to go to a regular school, and theirs was not a regular school. It was an old warehouse with the windows broken out and where parents, if there were schooled parents, gave some instruction, enough to convince WFP—which didn’t take a lot of convincing—to fund a school lunch program. Many of the children didn’t have parents because their parents had died from AIDS. I think, at that time, the percentage was like thirty percent of Swazi children were without parents at home.

Seija was there with me, but she was so weak that she sat on a wall by the building while we talked about how their program worked. When I looked over, there were probably thirty or forty children surrounding her. Perhaps they had never seen such blonde hair before. Her spirit had picked up, and she had started playing games with the kids, simple things like taking a pencil and tracing their hands on a piece of paper. They had never seen it done before. They were having fun and then said to her, “Let’s play one of our games.” They all held hands and danced around in a circle singing something. One of the Swazi WFP representatives asked if I knew what they were singing? Then she said, “They are singing, ‘we are all going to die. We all have AIDS, and we are all going to die.’” It was like “ring around the rosy,” which comes from the plague years in Europe. They probably knew more about what they sang than we could imagine.

Q: My God.

CLEVERLEY: It was very moving. Then we went to a school that was a regular school. The little children all had uniforms and carried blue dishes from the UN from where they ate their food. When I returned to Rome, my life was different and has been since. There is another world out there that is struggling just to eat.

Q: Well, let me ask you because it's so central to where we seem to be these days in the second, third decade of the 21st century. What do you say to, and what do you think we need to do to respond to those Americans who say, “Hey, we've got those problems here at home and you're not doing anything about it. Why are you spending our tax dollars over there?” Number one. Two, maybe that's just the way the world is and people you know, it is their problem. Why should we care if they're dying? You're just intervening and prolonging their agony, because at some point you're going to walk away. And three, how can I know that what you're telling me matters? Because they just like our money and they are doing what they want with it and you are just a puppet for it. Because those attitudes exist in our country rather broadly. Why does it matter? They're so far away, they're so poor, they're so miserable, but nothing we can do is really going to change it. Why does it matter?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, such attitudes do exist and quite often, they are sincerely held. People lack information because we are a very insular society in many ways, surprisingly, ironically. When I have told these stories—that's how I have usually responded to these types of questions by telling what I have seen—people are usually quite moved. Almost always someone will come to me to ask what they can do. Most people share a common deep humanity. When you tell these stories, they understand. They may understand that we are not condoning governments. Many or most are hungry because of poor governance. But these people are still dying, and their children are dying.

Q: Yeah, your stories are very powerful. That young woman, well, no-longer-looking-young woman with the sign on her door: “I love those who hate me.” How did it go?

CLEVERLEY: “I love those who hate me for no reason.”

Q: For no reason, yeah. Or for what, you know, for what I did not do.

CLEVERLEY: The hungry are, for the most part, innocent. We were trying with the WFP to help them stay alive, and we are talking about hundreds of millions, probably a greater number today. Another thing you can do is talk about the FAO and their projects. I saw an eighty-year-old woman and her fifty-five-year-old daughter show how they stayed alive in a country that was falling apart. And they stayed alive by learning to grow, through a program we were helping fund. So, though people usually warm up to those types of things, it is just what they don't know. They have heard things, they are misinformed.

Q: Is it something in our education system? Is it something in our media or is it that we are just such a big successful country that it is hard to conceive, unless you go there?

CLEVERLEY: We live in a big country where people don't learn languages. Many don't travel outside the United States. If you look at the percentage of Americans who actually have a passport and travel abroad, it's not very high compared to most countries. They just have not experienced anywhere, let alone Zimbabwe. They are still just talking about foreign countries on a level of generalization based on stories they have heard. If the past few years in American politics have a message, it might be that people will believe what they want to believe. If you have some credibility, then maybe telling what you have experienced might make a difference.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: So, that kind of brings me to an end of that tour. FAO's deputy director general, an American, was getting ready to retire at the same time I was leaving Rome into my own retirement. The United States nominated me as its candidate for the new deputy director general position. I'm not sure that Jacques Diouf was pleased with our nomination for a couple of reasons. One was I had been the recent deputy permanent representative at the United States Mission, and he probably was not sure of my loyalty to the FAO, as opposed to the United States. The other was that I had led the charge on the internal assessment. He probably didn't want a deputy with that baggage, since he was not fond of the entire initiative. Diouf didn't have to make a choice for a while, a year or so, and chose not to do so. By that time, I was already retired, and he chose another American who, incidentally, was in The Family. I've always wondered how much Tony Hall's finger might have been in this process that went on behind closed doors.

Retirement in Idaho and Virginia April 2006-present

I was moving into mandatory retirement. The Foreign Service Act allowed fourteen years in service for someone in the senior Foreign Service. When I took the job in Rome, I realized that I was just three years away from that. I also wanted to retire. There were some financial advantages to retiring from the field. So, I took the job in Rome realizing it was probably my last.

At the end of the Rome assignment, I was sorry that I was not retiring on a higher point. I had struggled throughout the job trying to get the mission up to “basics” in routines and practices. Although it was satisfying to leave the post functioning in much more normal fashion from what I found, this type of satisfaction would have been better felt in earlier assignments, not the last. It was like a baseball player retiring a few years after his best RBI records. Still, I felt I had achieved much on the substantive side of the job and left with a feeling of achievement. It was valuable work that conveyed a sense of urgency. It gave me a lot of satisfaction to see the difference we could make in the field. It was good to have that type of sense of accomplishment.

Throughout my career, one of the things I regretted was that I had spent most of my life far away from my extended family and had been absent from many important events along the way. We decided to move back to Idaho to live close to my parents who were getting up in age. They had seven children, none living close to them in Pocatello, Idaho.

The Shock of Coming in from the Cold

We bought a house in the mountains above Pocatello, a beautiful log home on a hillside overlooking a valley. It seemed remote but was only twenty minutes from my parents. We lived there during the last two years of their lives. The home was at 6,000 feet of elevation, and our first winter, twenty-four feet of snow fell. I was on my snowblower tractor sometimes three times a day keeping our steep hillside driveway open. It was an A-frame home with thirty-foot-high windows on the front. It is hard to explain the exhilarating feeling of watching a blizzard kicking up the white across that picture window or of sitting comfortably on the deck in a hot tub in -15 degree cold. But moving from Rome, Italy to Pocatello, Idaho was also a big cultural shock. I picked Seija up once from the mall after she had been shopping. She had tears in her eyes, and she moaned, “There are no temptations here!”

Q: Talk a little bit about this—there is a phrase for what you are describing, it is called re-entry shock. Most Americans probably are not familiar with the term. What did it mean to you? You've just given a very good example.

CLEVERLEY: Well yes, it was a re-entry shock. Most families who live abroad find returning home a more difficult cultural shock than moving abroad. When you arrive home, you are an American, but not necessarily a knowledgeable American. There is much to learn about how things are done, and you easily miss the glamor of diplomatic life, in spite of the many hardships that lifestyle generated in so many ways. You are going back to an ordinary type of life quite different from this diplomatic world where you had been living. In Pocatello, I was shopping for waterproof overalls and cowboy boots to wear when snow blowing, a world far from Via del Corso's top-end shops that I had passed every day on my way to work.

Q: Not ordinary for you. And you have also lost your standing, you have gone from being a rather big, important, significant somebody to nobody, except your parents' beloved son.

CLEVERLEY: It wasn't unexpected. We had seen it coming and had tried to grease the transition. I hadn't published my book in the United States yet and got it ready to publish. I wrote to the Idaho State University in Pocatello and offered as an adjunct to teach a course such as United States-European relations in the post-war world. They liked the idea, and I began teaching the class a few weeks after we arrived.

After Diplomacy, What?

I retired after a very intensive and busy career doing things I never would have dreamed. That was probably true for many in the foreign service, and however you measured the transition, it was a big step. At retirement, the huge question was how to achieve fulfillment after such a career? Before retiring, I never believed that would have been a problem for me. I always thought my career was not the end of things, just a means of getting to the things that I enjoyed. I never had difficulty being away from the office or handling time when I was on leave. Nevertheless, I found that post-retirement life was always busy, and getting gratification from it required finding things that I enjoyed.

Before we had moved to Rome, we had bought an apartment in Greece by the sea. Our idea was to live part of the year in Idaho in the mountains and part of it on the Mediterranean. It didn't work out as well as we expected. When we started having grandchildren, Seija didn't like being in Greece three or four months a year and preferred to be closer to family. In that regard, living in the mountains of Idaho with most of our family living in the Washington, D.C. suburbs, a twenty-four-hour trip from Pocatello, wasn't as practical as we thought. We eventually sold the Greek apartment, and when my parents died two years later, we moved to the Washington area. We found a place in Fredericksburg, Virginia, a dream house on four wooded acres.

I signed up as a WAE ["When Actually Employed"], a State Department program that hired retired people for temporary assignments. I agreed to do only foreign assignments. One day I received a phone call asking if I would be available to take a few months' position in Russia. I thought it was Moscow, but only a few days before I was supposed to depart, I learned it was instead in Vladivostok." That sounded exotic. Vladivostok was a city that had been off bounds for foreigners for most of the Cold War. Russia's Pacific Fleet was based there, and maybe that's why the Soviets kept it isolated. I was there for almost three months working as a political economic officer. It was a small consulate without any classified facility. We didn't have Marine guards. Another WAE assignment a couple years later was with the Inspector General's Office. I joined a team assigned to inspect our embassies in Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

I sought other things to keep me busy with challenging activities. I started teaching on-line university classes in economics and American history. But I found these too narrow and confined and gave them up after a year or two. I established a chapter of Ambassador Club International in Fredericksburg, and soon had 30-40 people attending monthly dinner meetings with speakers I recruited from among my former contacts and colleagues. The club was not associated with the diplomatic corps but was a Swiss-based organization that aimed to facilitate communal networking. At a later point, I decided to

write another book. It was a “hobby” that kept me busy for over five years as I traveled intensively through historical periods from the Middle Ages to World War II.

Q: Cool. Did it have a title or a concept?

CLEVERLEY: I wanted to tell the stories of people who lived during those times, especially during the historical watersheds of the past, such as the American Revolution. Most of these were ordinary types of families and the common thread going through them was that they were all my ancestors. I did not want to do a traditional family history. I made it a kind of “microhistory” that told about how people on the ground maneuvered through complex times. How did they live? What did they do? What was a good and what was a bad day?

Q: Well, you were in the right church.

CLEVERLEY: Yeah, I was in the right church for that. My mother had been a great genealogist for sixty years so I had the benefit of a lot of work she had done.

Q: Yeah. All the way back to the Middle Ages is pretty far back.

CLEVERLEY: My first chapter was on Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror. From there, I moved forward. When I came to the last chapter I called it, “Where Two Rivers Join.” The idea was that our lives are like a river flowing from the past. At some point, you marry, and your and your spouse’s two rivers join into a common flow. You “adopt” each other. So, for this chapter I wrote about Seija’s history from when she was young, through the war and evacuation to the point her parents died.

Q: What was your connection to Matilda? Were you Saxon or Norman?

CLEVERLEY: Her husband William was a Norman, although Matilda had Saxon ancestors, too.

Q: What? Norman. So, you are a Viking at heart, so you would say, I have more in common that you may realize.

CLEVERLEY: That’s interesting.

Q: The Normans were the Norsemen, the Vikings, in Normandy, France.

CLEVERLEY: That’s right. William was the great grandson of a Viking warlord. It was an intense book to write. It took five or six years.

Q: Has it been published?

CLEVERLEY: It was published in 2020 as *Family Stories...and How I Found Mine*. It is about six hundred and fifty pages. The publisher was a company called Genealogical Inc. or genealogical.com. It's America's oldest and largest publisher on genealogy topics.

Q: In the ground, yeah.

CLEVERLEY: A lot of people do genealogy, but most people are more interested in *family history* than *genealogy*. They want to know their family stories. They use genealogy to get there. And what I found was that you could discover more family stories from behind your desk, in front of your computer, than you would expect. Let me give a good example. Once I was reading a book about an ancestor from Rhode Island, Samuel Gorton. He was one of the earliest Americans to promote the idea of democracy and basic personal freedoms. Massachusetts' leaders hated him for that and even raided his home in Rhode Island, beyond the Bay Colony's jurisdiction. In chains, they paraded him around Massachusetts. He was probably the person the leaders of Puritan Massachusetts hated most.

Q: They were wrong thinkers down there in Rhode Island.

CLEVERLEY: They were. Non-conformists.

Q: Troublemakers, no doubt.

CLEVERLEY: While reading about him, I found a reference to a book that he had written in London in 1650 where he had traveled to get parliament to grant further recognition to Rhode Island. As I googled its title, I found it was available print-on-demand. Google and some others have digitized many books from the past, and this was one of them. The print-on-demand publisher made it available to order in its original format. It was written in 1650 and very rare. I ordered the book and within two weeks, I had a facsimile on my desk in front of me. I paid thirty dollars. I wanted stories, here they were in detail, in his own words, telling about a cruel period in American history that few know anything about.

Q: Yeah. Tell us about the book. Was it a—genealogy.inc, you know, it's not like Simon & Schuster but it is published. How was it sold? What kind of experience or consequence have you had with it or was it more just something privately for the family?

CLEVERLEY: The book got a lot of very good reviews. I was also asked to do two recorded videos to be presented at that year's RootsTech, the largest genealogical and family history gathering in the world. Six hundred thousand people participated in the online event. The problem is that *genealogical.com* charges forty-five dollars for the book, a sum that keeps it off many people's shopping list.

Q: Wow. Well, it sounds like we are lucky to have gotten you to tell your story and your diplomatic story, maybe you will be able to take the transcript and craft it into an equally compelling book product at some time. Lots of Foreign Service officers do. Will keep that

hope out there because your story has been quite wonderful and quite compelling. So, becoming a writer is what you've done in retirement effectively.

*So, it is a wonderful thing. Do you have any observations or feelings or beliefs about history and the United States? You know, we are going through a very contentious moment of struggling to recraft our narrative—which has turned out to be somewhat narrow—I highly, highly recommend a little book called *Union* on that. You would love it. It is more of a historiography than anything else, but history is not something that is very much taught or even held in common now, which is one of the struggles we are going through with, you know, adjusting our narrative. But we have long been regarded as a strangely ahistorical culture and people, in part because we are a young nation. We are not anything compared to most great nations in the world, but do you have any observations or thoughts or convictions in that area? Does history matter?*

Does History Matter?

CLEVERLEY: I believe history matters immensely. But I think part of the problem with history as a discipline is that when someone's writing a history, a dissertation for example, they are supposed to come up with something new and original. Since the basic constructs of American history are quite well known, it is often challenging to come up with a new and original episode that people don't know much about. How many books can you write about Abraham Lincoln or Stonewall Jackson? But you've got to come up with something new. It can be easier to come up with a new interpretation that is original and becomes your interpretation. And so, we continually get from authors of history new interpretations that sometimes may be a bunch of nonsense.

I bristle sometimes with new interpretations. Was Abraham Lincoln secretly gay? What about Thomas Jefferson and his lovers? You can criticize Thomas Jefferson for his lack of resolve towards slavery, but somewhere you need balance and perspective. One of the ideas that guides me is the concept that the past is a foreign country. And when you go to this foreign country, you must take it on its own terms, in its own way, and not think that your ways are necessarily superior to theirs. They might just equally say our ways today are inferior to theirs and be totally outraged at the types of things they see us do in our modern society. When we go to the past with a self-righteous attitude to criticize people for their weaknesses, we forget that first of all, this is the past and who are we to say?

*Q: Oh, yes.. Well, I want to put down for the record, one, because I think you in particular will appreciate it and maybe someone else will appreciate finding out about it. The book is called *Union* by Colin Woodard, and the subtitle is *The Struggle to Forge the Story of United States Nationhood*. And I guarantee you, it will be one of the most fascinating reads for anybody who is intrigued by American history and the American historical narrative to date that you will ever run into. One factoid that I think should cause everyone to pause, there was no such thing as American history until after the Civil War. It was only in the 1880s that the first professor of American history and class on American history emerged in one university.*

CLEVERLEY: Unbelievable. I'll have to get it.

Q: So, you know, if you talk about a young discipline and a young strain of history, what the author has uncovered about Frederick Turner is just absolutely fascinating because he is known as the “father of”, and for one thing and one thing only. He turned his back on it eventually, but two, it was the result of a single journal article, “the into the frontier” concept. But what you begin to see is how convenient that turn of narrative was to deflect from other things going on at the time.

CLEVERLEY: Well, I will look it up.

Q: Let us turn back now to Michael Cleverley and some reflections, however you would like to assess, reflect, share lessons learned, on this quite remarkable, significant life of diplomatic service, national service to your country and a personal family story that you shared with us?

Universals: Diplomacy and People

CLEVERLEY: This has been a tour of the past and my memories of it, a re-visit to times that I thought I had forgotten, or I had forgotten. I have been sitting at my computer screen expounding a philosophy of life after so many years in the Foreign Service. Picking up the “universals” and drawing the “broad conclusions” about something as big and complex as foreign service, however, is a challenge. One thing I want to avoid is getting analytically into too much detail about the Foreign Service in the past and future because it is immensely difficult. It is scary to project backwards or forwards with big generalizations.

There are a few universals, however, that I might attempt to speculate about. These are just a few things that come to my mind. One of them, as I said earlier, is that there is a need for diplomacy and a need for a Foreign Service to conceptualize and conduct it. Otherwise, we could sit back, send emails back and forth, and make phone calls on occasion to counterparts in foreign countries: diplomacy by Zoom, or telephone or email – or by AI. Or worse, our counterparts could just send us the messages.

Q: Diplomacy by Zoom.

CLEVERLEY: The purpose of diplomacy is to resolve issues, but diplomacy itself is about people. And the people that you meet on a Zoom are not exactly the same that you meet around your dining room table or in their offices or homes. When you get to know the people, you gain a chance for interaction. You can find difficult compromises, not just rehash positions. The Foreign Service offers that opportunity by having good people, especially generalists, abroad and in Washington to do diplomacy.

Perspective in Embassy Staffing

Q: Can you, I am sorry to interrupt, but for future reference, people may need to have a better understanding of what you mean by “generalist” and what you mean by

“specialist”? You are referring to a certain personnel system, a vocabulary tyranny, thrust, but help people understand what you mean by generalist versus specialist.

CLEVERLEY: I use the term “generalists” because most often they are the ones responsible for diplomacy. Perhaps we need to be careful. I know there has been a growing trend over the last forty or fifty years to staff the Foreign Service with specialists, sometimes to the point of letting the tail wag the dog. As a rule, specialists are people who don't go through the Foreign Service Officer exam. They are hired primarily to provide a specific service, for example, security at an embassy or building maintenance.

Q: Only operational specialists or are there also issue specialists? They know more about one thing—trafficking in women—but that's all they know.

CLEVERLEY: That's correct. In the field, I experienced only a few specialists among the officers in political or economic sections. But there were many in management, security, and GSO (General Services Office). Employing specialists is an easy and nice way to enhance your expertise in particular tasks of an embassy. But there must be some means of finding a balance. Many of the specialists are there to make sure that the embassy functions properly, but not to achieve the purpose of an embassy. A generalist is someone who takes the exam and goes from assignment to assignment and is expected to pick up on different issues quickly. They may not have the depth that many specialists have, but they do have breadth and usually over their career develop a broad understanding, if not expertise, in each of the embassy's various sections.

Over my years in the service, I saw a decline in the generalist/specialists ratio as more and more specialists arrived at post. I can understand that the security sections in embassies expanded because everybody was worried about the threats embassies face. But the purpose of an embassy is to conduct diplomacy and to perform consular operations – that's why embassies are there, that is why they spend the money and resources to be there, and why they hire specialists, in particular among the managerial support staff and security, to make it possible to be there. In Athens, for example, the size of the security section was huge, bigger than any other section in the embassy, except perhaps the broader management section. It seemed we had more tail than tooth.

Q: So, you had more tail than tooth. Platform maintenance.

CLEVERLEY: My point is that if we are talking about a need for the Foreign Service and a need for diplomacy in the future, it is important that we make sure that the embassies, or the people in embassies are doing diplomacy and not just supporting support people, platform maintenance.

People vs. Issues

The thread going through all universals is people. Diplomacy is as much about people as about issues. If we are going to promote the U.S. interest in something or inform the

Department about events that Washington should know or understand as it formulates policies, we have to interface with people, people with faces, flesh, and bones.

Like I said several times earlier, as Americans, we tend to focus too much on issues. We think the power of issues should be self-evident. But there is a fog in diplomacy. To break through it, we must interface and communicate, to develop trust and loyalty. Our counterparts will not always agree with us, but they must believe that we honestly represent a legitimate point of view that they should take into consideration and not discount because we are Americans, the big guy, or the bully on the block, as it may occasionally seem. We must get past this potentially negative baggage that we carry because we happen to be the most important superpower in the world. Much of the world that we live in still places great value on social relationships. Developing these relationships has great potential to promote our interests.

Practitioners of Diplomacy – Expertise, Management, Outreach

Another universal, I would suggest, is that certain qualities are needed in mission direction and execution. I wrote an article for the *Foreign Service Journal* right after I retired on what makes a successful ambassador. I drew on my perspective after having been a DCM for several great ambassadors, as well as a Chargé for an extended period. I touched on these points earlier, but let me do that again, this time expanding the thought to what makes a successful practitioner of diplomacy, or Foreign Service Officer.

Q: And what are those qualities?

CLEVERLEY: The first quality is expertise on the issues. You really do need to know the issues. We want smart, educated people who understand issues well and can argue them. Traditionally, I think our Foreign Service examination process has tried to emphasize that quality by selecting people who might do well promoting the issues we deem important.

Outreach is the second one. This is the people-to-people aspect of a diplomatic job. We believe that the United States brought an appreciation for democracy and human rights and values to the modern world. In Europe, they speculated about these things in the 18th and 19th centuries, but by that time we were already trying to practice them. American diplomats can best express those values in face-to-face interactions with the people around us. Quite often foreigners don't understand who we are, Europeans especially. Sometimes, they don't know Americans at all, even though they think they do.

Q: Exactly. Just because they speak English doesn't mean they understand what the subtext is coming from an American.

CLEVERLEY: Non-Americans often don't even have the basic facts right. I remember a public presentation near Vladivostok. In my remarks I used the phrase, "After we won World War II..." What I meant by "we" was the Russians, the Americans, the allies. A woman came up afterwards, "What did you really mean by that? You didn't win, you weren't part of that victory. Russia won World War II." I knew where she was coming

from. She probably had been told that since she was little. She wasn't even giving us credit for one of our biggest accomplishments in the 20th century.

Q: The Great Patriotic War.

CLEVERLEY: Yes, the Great Patriotic War. I explained to her that we were allies; we worked together. They were fighting on the eastern front; we were fighting the Germans in Normandy. We also were giving Russia a lot of equipment. For example, on display right in front of the Vladivostok train station at the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Express was a big locomotive we gave as lend-lease to Russia. Hopefully, getting out face-to-face to meet people was clarifying. We can't challenge such ignorance without being there. We must reach out to people.

The third quality is the ability to successfully manage a mission, to make sure the mission as an organization is running well. I don't know if the Foreign Service has done this as well as it should. Certainly, a lot of ambassadors and DCMs have not done it as well as they might. And I saw a lot of section chiefs over my career who were dismally failing at managing their sections or units. I know from experience in several different senior jobs in a number of embassies how difficult management can be. I must quickly add that I also saw chiefs of mission, DCMs, and other mission managers who excelled in all three of these areas. I admire those who did them all well, and I believe the goal for a Foreign Service Officer should be to work to find excellence in all three.

The Mentoring Multiplier

Throughout all my years with State, the Department raced after resources, and the shortage of those resources complicated the management process. Scarcity was a given, but it was hardly helpful to blame shortages for lack of success. The biggest multiplier in any organization is the quality of the people who work there. If you have well mentored people, you will have a more effective, efficient operation at any resource level. Mentoring has a big pay-off. The lack of mentoring has a higher price than we often realize. There are a lot of people who don't do their job well because they have never been taught how to do their job well. Throughout my career, I often saw the correlation between mentoring and performance.

Q: What do you mean by mentoring? It is a fashionable word.

CLEVERLEY: Of course it is. We often like fashionable words to cover our failures with finesse. Mentoring has to do with training your people on a one-to-one basis. When I use the term mentoring, I am talking about a continual process in managing those working for you, not in terms of "let's get together every Tuesday afternoon and have an hour of mentoring." You probably don't have time for that, and it might not be focused in a world where you work with individuals who have a lot of natural ability.

Q: But doesn't that make special and personal relationships, and it leads to an inside culture just where you have to have a magic key to figure out how to get into it? I am

giving you the counter argument obviously. So, how do you do that on a one-on-one basis, depending on the vagaries of individual personalities in leadership, some professional, some temporarily political, to create this mentoring that you are talking about, which I think everybody agrees is important.

CLEVERLEY: Mentoring is a long-term program, a long-term investment. As a section chief or a DCM, your desk is piled with things to do. It is often easy to concentrate on your paper rather than the person in the next office, both of which may need some attention. It may seem faster to take care of a problem yourself, or to accept a slightly substandard piece of work from someone reporting to you, instead of sitting down and saying, “I want you to do this. Now, let me work with you on how to do it well.”

Failure to engage and to mentor in this way is like favoring *consumption over investment* as a form of management. We need to invest in people, but to do that, we must find time. And in order to find it, we take away from what we want to do now. But there is value in long-term investments. This is especially true in the Foreign Service where many officers from day one are highly capable people.

And that’s my second point about mentoring: the Foreign Service is endowed with a high-ability group of people. As pleasing and simple as chronological seniority is as a bureaucratic tool, it often tends to hold younger but capable officers from reaching their potential during their early tours in the service. Older officers are “senior” (and younger officers are “junior”), and the big or challenging tasks don’t end up on younger officers’ desks. But often, younger officers can take these on as well as anyone else.

I’ll give you an example. When I was a young officer in Helsinki, on my second Foreign Service tour, there was a summer when a number of officers were on leave or sick. For several weeks, I was head of the economic section, the consular section, and the commercial section all at the same time. I was a newly promoted O3 officer. For weeks, I ran back and forth between the offices in two separate buildings. But our section was assigned a young intern named Elise who was studying at the Woodrow Wilson School. I saw from the beginning that Elise was very talented. She knew nothing about everyday foreign service work, but she was very bright and very capable. I realized that amidst all the chaos that I was going through, spending time teaching her how to do a few things could have a big payoff for the embassy, and especially for me.

Finding time for this was initially painful because it meant I had to either do my work faster or longer into the evening. But I explained to her how to take on tasks an experienced FSO might be expected to do and mentored her progress. One week, there was an OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries] meeting in Helsinki, something of real interest in Washington – remember this was 1983 during the years OPEC was creating havoc in world oil markets. I told Elise that I was going to task her with following the meeting. Washington would be interested in what came out of the discussions, and she could consider herself an American diplomat working for the embassy. When it was over, I wanted a report on what had been talked about, what was important, and what the priorities were.

Elise was excited to take this on, and we talked almost daily about what she was doing. She somehow managed to get press credentials for herself. With these press credentials, she got into many of the meetings. She also got invited to a dinner where she sat next to Sheikh Yamani, who was the oil minister in Saudi Arabia. Based on what she learned, Elise wrote an excellent report. I helped with suggestions through all this and let her take the credit, all of which she deserved. She was capable and maybe did a better job than many foreign service officers could have done. I was willing to give her a long leash, making sure that I mentored her and let her do the work.

Q: Did she become a foreign service officer?

CLEVERLEY: I lost track of Elise over the years, but one day, she wrote to me and said I might not be surprised to know that she was in the Foreign Service.

Q: Wonderful story.

CLEVERLEY: Another example explores just the opposite. It took place when I was economic counselor in Athens. In the political section was a young junior officer, very bright, very smart, and fun to talk to. However, he received little mentoring that helped him learn to be a good Foreign Service officer. Once, he wrote a report about Turkish minorities in Greek Macedonia. I mentioned earlier how this was a very turbulent issue.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Neuralgic.

CLEVERLEY: For all the potential volatility of this topic, his report was sent to Washington without proper vetting from his section chief, the DCM, or the ambassador, and somehow surfaced in the press. It was like a firestorm descending. The Greeks especially blamed the ambassador because he was a Greek American, and they thought he should have known better. Ambassador Sotirhos in a rare, candid moment told me his biggest regret was not reading the draft of the report more carefully. The officer's section chief should have helped him with the conceptualization and writing. If you are going to make an analysis of a subject like this, you better make sure you are right, and you better phrase it in a way that reduces the damage if it comes out. None of that happened. The storm overclouded the front office, the political section, and the consulate general in Thessaloniki for some months. Good mentoring has a big payoff, and the lack of it has a payoff of another sort.

Q: It occurs to me that you are providing a not irrelevant metaphor for diplomacy. Because diplomacy is not a short-term proposition, it is an investment. And it does not happen overnight. It does not very often even happen in a year or so. I was reflecting when you were talking about the resource problem. You are absolutely correct and we can always make do with, you know, do more with less. But I was tempted to interrupt and ask if it is realistic to have a State Department year to year budget? Because nothing the State Department does is twelve months.

CLEVERLEY: That's right.

Q: And if you don't have at least a three to five-year “look back where we are looking forward” capability, you are strangled from day one. Because nothing happens in twelve months.

CLEVERLEY: I suspect that may be true in other federal departments, as well, but it's wishful thinking for the State Department that in an ordinary year seems to be shortchanged in annual budget calculations. In the political environment where we live, we are lucky for the years when we have a one-year budget for the twelve months it lasts.

Q: Well, and it is the problem with the IT [information technology] world right now. Programmers do zeros and ones exempt of any knowledge or any, frankly interest in or care for, the end user. And actually, it is the end user without whom all the zeros and ones are not worth two feet. And if you are not making life better, more valuable, accessible for the person who is actually going to use the product, what have you gained?

CLEVERLEY: That's right. Wouldn't that be a godsend: a three- to five-year budget? A great idea. When that will happen, I don't know, but one thing that can happen is to personally invest in the people who are working with you, and make sure that they are as good as they can possibly be.

Institutional Memory

Q: What did you find about, because now we live in a digital world where databases and local Wikis are possible. You know, you and I grew up when there were secretaries who filed hard copies in an organized filing system, tags, among other things. And it was a pre digital world. Today, we have the ability to knowledge manage and yet we don't, we can't. There is no system for it. And very often, people come in and start all over again. There is no real—in my last ten years in the Foreign Service, there was never a file that I could go to and read into. I could find people maybe and I could deduce. But the filing system? We had people who were not literate enough to understand where to put things if they had been doing it. And there was no filing system.

Today, there is a phrase in knowledge management, there is capability digitally. How did you handle at the end of your career, with mobility, the transfer of knowledge and seamless—you know, because part of diplomacy is that you are a nobody. You are a first secretary, a second secretary, a third secretary, a counselor, you know, a minister counselor—you are the rank and you talk to people of your counterparts, internationally. But it is supposed to be seamless. And yet, how do you transfer the knowledge and the thread from one tour to the next? How do people pick up the thread? I guess that is what I'm trying to say.

CLEVERLEY: You are talking about institutional memory which is always limited. But I never found a case, like I mentioned earlier, of having no files – no chronological records of cables, memos, and other relevant information – like I did at our mission in Rome. Let

me tell you, whatever we had in earlier offices, looked rich compared to that. The same problems in establishing an institutional memory can plague an operation, whether it's digital or hard copy. The thing is, officers, and especially section chiefs need to guarantee one exists. The files, a record, of course, are important for allowing you to do that.

Q: Now, was your file still hard or was it digital by then?

CLEVERLEY: They were hard files.

Q: And what year was that? 2003?

CLEVERLEY: Yeah. So, I showed them how to make files and we started building up an office memory. You do have to have some form of filing. I never had experience with digital files except the ones I kept for myself.

Q: And they were private, were they? You had your taxonomy. There was no system taxonomy. You had your system. And did you pass it on to your successor? Or did your successor then start his own library or her own library when they arrived?

CLEVERLEY: I scoured my digital and hard files with every transfer to make sure my successor did not have to start from ground zero. Every economic office and front office I worked in took advantage of the TAGS system we used on our cables to identify the subject category of the message, such as "PGOV" for messages about the government. In some of the sections, the locally hired nationals were the backbone of an institutional memory.

Q: Well, it is one reason we are doing oral histories, I guess. To return to your list of enduring essentials, mentoring, was there something in addition to that?

Know Your Hosts

CLEVERLEY: To return to one universal element in foreign service work, I will paraphrase Sun Tzu's famous advice, "Know your enemy" with "Know your hosts." They are not our enemy, but they are those who weigh down the other side of our diplomatic teeter-tottering. I think this maxim is a prerequisite to reaching our potential as successful diplomats. If we don't know the people who populate our environment, the outcomes from our work may be much less than we wanted. I take a broad view of this: know their culture, their history, their religion, their literature, their celebrities, and personalities: perhaps more than knowing them, experiencing them. It makes it so much easier for us to understand what is happening around us.

Sometimes, failing to know can be tragic. The Vietnam War has been said to be a result of Americans' not understanding who and what Vietnam was and what we were getting into. The same is equally so on the personal level. I told earlier how in South Africa we united Jamison, our gardener, and his wife Lettie and their kids for the first time by making it possible to live together in the quarters behind our residence. Seija taught her

how to cook and how to set and wait our tables and functions. After we left South Africa, my successor was delighted when she heard what we had done. She followed through and even put Lettie into a cooking school where she developed valuable expertise. Well, going on one more generation of foreign service officers living in this residence, the next person was a Black American who you would have thought would be in tune with what was happening in South Africa's transitional society and the types of hardships Black South Africans went through. One of the first things she did, however, was to fire both Jamison and Lettie. She didn't want to pay what anyone would have to say was a very modest salary to Jamison and his wife.

Q: My God.

CLEVERLEY: What I am saying is that you must connect with your host country and its people in a knowledgeable, insightful way if you expect to understand the host environment and to find the opportunities that may exist there for the goals our diplomacy are meant to drive. In a society like this one, it wasn't as if Jamison's family could just get another job, like in other places. Unemployment among Black South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa was between forty and fifty percent. Letting them go was putting them on the street without great prospects for the near future. During a visit to Pretoria two or three years later, we found Jamison again after a good deal of effort. They had been unemployed for some time. Letty had finally found a housekeeping job, but they were not able to live together. I contacted the CLO and the DCM asking if they could tell new families who might be looking for domestic help about Jamison's and Letty's experience working for embassy officers. After that, I permanently lost track of this family.

It seems to me that by failing to grasp the drama right around her, this officer seemed to miss the broad landscape of immediate post-apartheid South Africa. I'm sure it's obvious that when I talk about knowing your host, I'm talking about more than FSI area studies.

Let me just introduce my wife, Seija, who is walking into the room.

Q: Oh yes!

CLEVERLEY, S.: Hello!

Q: Hi! The famous Seija. I am so delighted.

CLEVERLEY, S.: Yeah, thank you for taking so much time to interview Michael.

Q: Well, it is your story too. No foreign service officer who is married has a singular experience, as you well know. Do you have any words of wisdom or assessment of the life you have led?

CLEVERLEY, S.: Well, I think it was a wonderful career. Even if you are not a tandem couple, I think still, like you said, it involves the spouse. If you want to do effective work, I think you have to do it together as a couple.

Q: And what are some of your most memorable moments that didn't have anything to do with Michael, but were just Seija's.

CLEVERLEY, S.: Yeah, I think the most important part of every assignment we had was to plant my roots deep into the soil. We made lots of friends. I think it was very enriching from that point of view. I don't think we otherwise would have been able to come into contact with so many fascinating and interesting people.

Q: And how did your children feel about this life that uprooted them every time they got settled and they started blooming, somebody ripped them out and put them in a new garden.

CLEVERLEY, S.: Our oldest children were twin daughters. They hated moving, especially once they got older. So, it was difficult for our daughters to leave their friends behind, but I think all of our children have loved foreign service life. We were a very close family. I think that helped.

Q: Do you think being in the Foreign Service foxhole had something to do with that? By that I mean, there is drama, stress, pressure on families when they move because they have only themselves, particularly at certain moments. And some people think that they might have been even closer because they did live this very world-wide available life. That might not have happened the same way had they been in the United States. I was just wondering if you had any reflection on that?

CLEVERLEY, S.: I don't know. I come from Karelian roots, and I think Karelians in many ways are like Greeks and Italians. They are hospitable and very family-oriented people. So, I think our experience would have been the same whether or not living a foreign service life or in the United States. I think we have always been a very close family. But I am sure, of course, certain elements of foreign service life, you know, left their own positive mark.

Our children are very social, they are very outgoing. I think foreign service life was actually easier for Michael and me when our children lived with us. They reached out to others very well and were really good ambassadors for our family. We always tried to involve them as part of the representational life, so they became friends with many of these people.

Q: I think you are touching on something that is very important. You were saying that, you know, the whole family was involved. And it seems to me that in many of the countries that you lived in, family was the central unit of the culture. And if you hadn't been a family, maybe something would have been lost.

CLEVERLEY, S.: You know, our church played an important part of our foreign service life, becoming like a family to us. It emphasizes pretty much the importance of family.

Q: And you had a community in your church wherever you went. Is that correct?

CLEVERLEY, S.: That's right. Even here in the United States, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, you know. It was not very easy to get to know people from that area, the New England area. But we had just lived there one week and already found friends at church. We rented the house we lived in from a professor who was away for an academic year. The professor's son, Henry, came to visit us once a week. After our first or second week, our phone rang, and people were ringing our doorbell. Henry said "How is this? I have lived here several years, and I don't even know my neighbors." They were our new family met at church.

Q: Well, it sounds like the United States was very, very, very lucky to have the Cleverleys as diplomats for—how many years Michael?

CLEVERLEY, S.: Thirty.

Q: Thirty years, yes. Well, those of us who have lived that life know that families are an intimate part of it and that they too served, so, thank you Seija.

CLEVERLEY, S.: Oh, it was so nice to meet you, Stephanie.

Q: Pleasure is mine.

CLEVERLEY, S.: And hope you have had a—

Q: You are now a living legend.

CLEVERLEY, S.: Oh legend. Oh okay.

Q: You are a living legend now.

CLEVERLEY, S.: Oh, that's right. Well, have a nice springtime and enjoy the chat. I'll be around.

Q: You too. Okay, so, wrap-up. This is your life, what is your conclusion?

Taking Advantage of Comparative Advantage

CLEVERLEY: It was a great career. Ours was a career better than I could ever have foreseen or hoped. It was perfect for me and my family. We were happy when we started and happy at the end. I wasn't delighted about retiring so early – I was only 58 – but we were glad that we had possessed such a life and adventure. Perhaps more than anything else, what made it so was that the Foreign Service let me pursue a career that took

advantage of what I considered my comparative advantages. It let me perform duties for which I was best trained and duties that were of interest to me.

If I were starting my career today, that might not be the case. So much “hoop jumping” seems to infuse the career path. Our Foreign Service son has had to go through what some call “hoop jumping” or “card punching:” a bunch of hoops that you must jump through to be promoted. You must have an assignment outside of your cone, you must do one outside of your geographic area, and so forth. Such rules potentially can be levelers. It seems to me that the purpose of the Foreign Service is not to be an exercise in equity, but to promote America’s foreign policy as effectively and efficiently as possible. As happens in the private sector, professionals need to be employed where they make the greatest contribution. Of course, you want a service that is “fair,” but “fairness” doesn’t necessarily mean “equity.” You get the best out of your people if you let them do as much as possible – within the constraints that are there for sure – of what they do well and where they like to go. These constraints did not exist so much when I was a Foreign Service officer. For the most part, they sent people where they thought they would do a good job. I was fortunate and lucky in so many ways, both in terms of my mentors and the assignments I had. It allowed me to pursue the things that I thought I did well and was interested in.

Q: So, are you saying that hoop jumping is enforced uniformity in the name of trying to create some sort of “equity”, versus acknowledging and recognizing that any group of people have different strengths, and allowing them and allowing the organic process of surfacing comparative advantages, is more realistic, is better? Even though it may produce a European club or a Latin American club, or an Asian club?

CLEVERLEY: Yes, I think so. They inhibit the officer and the Service from exploiting each person’s “comparative advantage.” I found officers usually developed an affinity for a geographic region without having to sample the menu with different geographical assignments. There was always a corps of Middle East hands, Russian specialists, East Asia and Africa officers who served many assignments in the area, spoke relevant languages, and enjoyed much expertise in the region.

As far as cross-sectional experience goes, I think officers can get cross-sectional expertise without mapping their assignment pattern on a spreadsheet for bidding and getting promotions. Certainly, I did in smaller posts. As a junior economic officer in Helsinki, I also had the title of Vice-Consul, went through consular training before traveling to post, and backed up the consular section. As I mentioned earlier, one summer in Helsinki I headed the consular section in the absence of the Consul. Simultaneously, I led the commercial section. I did a lot of outreach and speaking with our public affairs office. I expanded my job beyond the narrow confines of my job label, I got experience doing different types of work, and didn’t take out of cone assignments for an entire tour.

Equity to me is not necessarily an overriding objective in an organization such as ours. I am not suggesting favoritism, sex or job discrimination, or a lack of transparency, but just the opposite, meritocracy. Put your people doing things they do best. Get the best out of

each individual, what they have to offer, and not force them into doing some type of job that they would never choose on their own if they could help it.

Like I said above, discussing these few universals is not a grand strategy for the Foreign Service. I'm not sure how easy, or even possible that is for us. Time knows turbulence, and straight-lining into the future has never been very successful, even with such quantifiable topics as the economy. Rather than pulling out a cloudy crystal ball, I believe it is much more productive to try to outline elements of Foreign Service that actually worked in my experience, things that I think will always offer positive outcomes. That is what I have tried to do.

I want to thank you, Stephanie, for leading me so intelligently and ably through this long history of my career. It has been a fulfilling tour of the past and my memories. This has been a really pleasant and heart-felt flow of recollections from the strengths, or weaknesses, of the years gone by, a throwback to things that I thought I had forgotten, or I had forgotten.

Q: Well, that is why it is important to capture them because we do lose them more quickly than we realize. And if it is not named, it doesn't exist. If it is not told, there is no history. And if there is no history, there is no culture, there is no civilization.

CLEVERLEY: That is a profound way to say it.

Q: So, maybe we can recruit you to do oral histories in your spare time?

CLEVERLEY: Well, we can think about it.

Q: It has been a wonderful story, Mike. And I think everybody is going to be very much enriched by the fact that you have taken the time to do it. Thank you very much for that. And well, unless you have anything you want to add, we'll bring it to a close.

End of interview

ADDENDUM

For further reading, you can find J. Michael Cleverley's book: *An American Tune: A Memoir* at this [link](#).