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

RENATE COLESHILL

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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Q: This is the 19th of January 2012. This is an interview with Renate Coleshill, and this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. To begin with, when and where were you born?

COLESHILL: I was born on April 26, 1946 in Mannheim, Germany.

Q: Your maiden name is Zimmermann?

COLESHILL: It is, with two n's.

Q: Could you talk a bit about on your father's side, the Zimmermann family, what you know about it?

COLESHILL: My grandparents also came from the Mannheim, Germany area. Unfortunately my family history doesn't go back any further than my grandparents. My dad was the younger of two. I have no idea what my grandfather did. He died before I was born. My grandmother was a pastry chef. They were firmly middle class people. They both worked, they owned a house, a very nice house. My father's older brother, Martin, was 13 years older than my dad. Uncle Martin came to the United States before the 1929 crash. He was a traveling salesman, I think selling nylons and such, door-to-door. When Wall Street crashed in 1929, he returned to Germany, and eventually became a vice president for Daimler-Benz. Sometime in the mid-50s he went to India, to build one of the first Daimler factories somewhere in India. I mention this because this becomes important when we talk about how I joined the Foreign Service.

My dad left school at age 14. He told my grandfather that he wanted to be a member of the German merchant marine. My grandfather told him that was a fine ambition which he could pursue after he got a trade. He apprenticed with a company called Bopp and Reuther and was a journeyman tool and die maker with them until he was conscripted into the German army in 1938.

Q: Were you getting from the family at all stories about particularly the Hitler time, the Hitler side and the war and about the life in Mannheim?

COLESHILL: More about life in Germany than the politics of the day.

Q: What were you hearing?

COLESHILL: My parents and their families were working class folks who were fervently anti-communist. My mother was a bookkeeper for a fairly large department store. Initially they thought Hitler was good for Germany. For example, the economy improved, the inflation rate reduced; unemployment dropped thanks to massive construction projects of roads and railways. Hitler was a great speaker and roused the population to believe in his rhetoric. Once it became apparent that a lot of this was merely propaganda, they bought into the theory that Hitler would take care of the communists, and then Germany would vote Hitler out of power.

Dad was conscripted into the Army in 1938. My parents married in late 1941 while my dad was still stationed in Mannheim. My dad was shipped out in 1942. When my mother learned she was pregnant, she moved back into her family home, a good-sized house outside of the city limits, where my maternal grandmother raised chickens, had an extensive vegetable garden, and fruit and nut trees. They were almost self sufficient with eggs, poultry, and fruits and vegetables. Of course my maternal grandmother's house had to be "good-sized" because my mother was the second youngest of 11 children, seven of whom were still alive after the war. My sister was born in the spring of 1943. My mother wrote him that she was a healthy dark-haired child. When my dad saw her the first time some eight months later, Inge's hair had turned blonde but it was such a gradual change that my mother failed to mention it in her letters.

The story was told that my dad was in a unit with other men from Mannheim and from the Gutchenstap, which was the neighborhood of Mannheim where he lived. When the Germans recruited or conscripted, they put people together into the same unit from the same neighborhood. He was in this unit with his best friend and his cousin and lots of people he knew. On the Russian front he was in an anti-aircraft unit. He often told stories about how it was very difficult to tell whether they were shooting down a Russian plane or a German plane. Most decisions were made on the basis of which direction the plane was flying.

Toward the end of the war an officer who was from Mannheim Gutchenstap came to my dad and said he, several other officers and some other enlisted men were going to desert that night because they thought the war was coming to an end and Germany was losing. He said, "We don't want to be caught by the Russians, so we're going to desert tonight, and we're going to head west to surrender to either the British or American troops." And that is indeed what they did.

A week and a half later they surrendered to French troops. He then went to a French prisoner of war camp for six weeks before being released. His best friend was released earlier and came my mother and said, "Erich is okay. He hasn't been injured, and he is held as a prisoner of war by the French. They are processing everyone out. He will be home within a week, 10 days at the most."

So the war was lost; Germany was in shambles. They two bright spots in my mother's life were that her two-year old was healthy and her husband was coming home, apparently also in good health. Even though she was Catholic, she decided to use birth control. She went to her eldest sister who is in those days was a fallen woman because she had had a child out of wedlock, and she asked to my Aunt Erika, "So, Erich's coming home. What can I do?" My aunt lent my mother a diaphragm [laughter] and here I am!" Of course it didn't fit my mother because diaphragms are sized. How naïve my mother was and my fallen aunt was equally naïve. That's possibly why she was a fallen woman. [laughter]

Q: Was she known in the family ever after as the fallen woman?

COLESHILL: Oh, God, we have always talked about her as the fallen woman! [laughter]

My mother accumulated a little furniture and household things during the early war years. Towards the end of the war, Mannheim, as you know, was bombed very heavily because it was an industrial town, and it was very much part of Germany's war machine. Everyone was scrambling to save their possessions so she found someone who shipped her furniture across down the Rhine River and across the Lauter River for safekeeping in a warehouse. Unfortunately, at the end of the war, the furniture warehouse was in France and she could not get it back.

At the end of the war there was great hardship because they had nowhere to live. Food was of course very rationed.

Q: These were extremely difficult times. I served in Germany in '53, '54, '55 in the military in Frankfort and one knows what the difficulty is.

COLESHILL: Of course you had food.

Q: Oh, yes. I mean no. We'd get the stories of the difficulties of living and surviving. Did you ever read an excellent book called A Woman in Berlin?

COLESHILL: No.

Q: There's an English translation. She wrote a book. She was an editor of something. I think they finally located who she was. She tells of being in Berlin with the Soviet occupation and all and how she had to seek out a protector to keep her from the ravages of the… That whole German story is the occupation as one that probably hasn't really been told yet. An awful lot of memories.

COLESHILL: I'm sure. The interesting thing is my parents didn't talk a lot about either Hitler's rise to power to the run-up to the war. I know that my dad felt that Hitler came to power because he restored German pride and improved economic conditions. It seemed to him the choice was Hitler or the communists. He said many Germans felt that if they

let Hitler take care of the communism and they would take care of Hitler on the next election. Of course it did not happen that way, and he never actually addressed why he thought that the Germans weren't able to get rid of Hitler or to see what Hitler was doing.

My first assignment was in Warsaw, Poland, and it was really there that I got a fuller measure of what happened in Germany and the horrific slaughter at the concentration camps. Certainly I had read The Diary of Anne Frank, but never really grasped how horrific Hitler, the brown shirts and the Nazis were. This is my heritage for God's sake, so I came home and tried to get into a dialogue with my parents about this. My mother's reaction was, "Well, we didn't know what Hitler was doing." I said, "But Mom! They were shipping Jews in cattle cars across the country." She said, "They could have been Jews, and they could have been soldiers, because they traveled the same way. Every passing train looked the same from the outside." Her attitude also was, "Well, you know, the Jews knew this was happening. Why didn't they just leave?" I said, "But it's their country!" She had no response to that, and it shocked me that these two loving people who raised us without a trace of racism or prejudice could have turned a blind eye to what was happening at that time.

I dated a young Jewish man, a Sikh and a Muslim. In those days you brought everybody home. They never outwardly batted an eyelash at any of this cross-cultural dating. As a matter of fact, the only person they ever objected to was a Texan who arrived wearing cowboy boots and had a massive belt buckle. I still can't understand how they could sit back and watch what was going on. My dad said one time, "You know, there wasn't a lot that we individuals felt we could do, and when the army called me up, I had to do my duty."

Q: This is the tragedy of what can happen in a totalitarianism state. The individual is sort of submerged in this State and really does feel pretty helpless.

COLESHILL: Yes, and of course everyone was struggling to make their own living and things under Hitler were getting economically better. Unfortunately my mother's family was not getting better. They were still struggling. My dad was a journeyman tool and die maker and had a decent job but he was still a young man. They were both working, hoping to get married and have a family. In order to do that one needed housing. It was *the* biggest issue. Where does one, even before the war, find housing? You cannot marry until you can afford to provide for some sort of house.

Q: The war is over. You were pretty young. Very young really. Were you there during any part of the occupation or had you left?

COLESHILL: As I mentioned, by dad came home from the war in August 1945. My mother gets pregnant right away and they had nowhere to live. My dad, mom and sister stayed at my paternal grandmother's house during the day. They couldn't sleep there because there was no room. Because of the massive housing shortage, my grandmother was not allowed to evict the border she had to take in during the war. So my parents rented a bedroom three blocks away. They weren't allowed to take my sister there, so she

slept in my grandmother's room while my parents shuttled back and forth. Then in April 1946 I arrived!

By this time life had improved. On April 26, 1946 my father was building a chicken coup because my maternal grandmother had given my parents some chicks. My mother told my grandmother that her water has broken. My grandmother's response: "Well, you can't disturb Erich now because he has to finish the chicken coup so he can have these chicks into the chicken coup overnight." My mother then, un-accompanied, rode a tram to the hospital and had her baby.

My mother actually told the story that when she discovered she was pregnant she went to her doctor and, even though she was Catholic, it was the first time in her life she believed it would be a greater sin to bring a child into the world at that time, than to have an abortion.

The doctor said my mother was not pregnant. My mother knew what pregnancy felt like, so she knew she was pregnant. He said, "No. Come back and see me in four weeks." Four weeks later she went back, and he still said she was not pregnant, and she still insisted that she was. He told her to come back in two weeks. Two weeks later he declared her pregnant. Then she became eligible for more rations.

Whether her doctor would not confirm her pregnancy at the beginning because of the increased rations or whether he believed she would either to try to self-abort or commit suicide, I don't know. I understand both events had taken place in Germany when some women were pregnant by soldiers, either raped or not. It was a very real social problem. But he didn't confirm her pregnancy until she was about four and a half months pregnant, and that's pretty pregnant.

My mother, alone, took public transport to the maternity hospital. That evening about eight o'clock my dad arrived with a bunch of lilacs he had cut from a neighbor's garden presumably with permission, but I don't know that, either. And there I was. .

The next day diphtheria broke out in the hospital, and so my mother bundled me up and took the tram home. When she got there my father was working in the garden. My grandmother was surprised to see my mom and asked, "What are you doing here? You should be in the hospital." Mother's response was, "No I'm not. Diphtheria has broken out. So I left." Even though, initially, this was no world to bring a child into, once that child was born, my mother would not let it die of diphtheria in a hospital.

Q*: You're lucky to be here!*

COLESHILL: Indeed!

Q: Your father went first to the United States?
My father left Germany, for Canada, in 1951; My mother, sister, and I left on my sixth birthday, April, 26 1952.

Q: How did the emigration business work for your father and the rest of the family?

COLESHILL: That too was interesting because, in Germany, at the end of the war, there was no toilet paper. Old newsprint was used. I remember this from our Frankfurt home where we cut newsprint into correctly shaped rectangles and placed them in box on the wall. Before using, one crinkled the paper to soften it.

My dad was in the bathroom at work and read "the little rectangle." He read part of an article about the Canadian government advertising interviews for skilled craftsmen. He could not find the entire article so he and his best friend, who worked at the same factory, asked one of the female office workers to look in the ladies room for the rest of the article. Ultimately they discovered that they had to go to a Canadian Consulate for an interview. My sister and I are not in agreement on this. I thought we went to Düsseldorf. My sister thought we went to Stuttgart, so I'm not sure where we went. They did find where they had to go. I don't know how he found out when it was. Maybe that was on part of the newsprint that they found because God knows he couldn't have just picked up a phone and called anyone.

As a family, we went to Stuttgart or Düsseldorf to the Canadian consulate, and found it filled with Germans wanting to emigrate. My dad was given a number, and we sat there and waited and waited. Mother had packed lunch, but it was getting to be four o'clock, and my sister and I were restless. I would have been aged nearly four years: My sister was seven.

As we were getting fidgety my dad went to the secretary and said, "I have to take these children out for a little bit and find them food. Can you tell me how long it's going to be?" She said, "Let me see your number," and whatever his number was, she said, "You are never going to get in today. You will have to come back tomorrow. You bring this number back, and I will trade it in for a lower number tomorrow." He said, "I cannot come back tomorrow. I have made transportation arrangements, and this is it. Today is all I can do." She said, "You go out and get the children something to eat. They have been good all day long. Be back by five o'clock, when we take our last interview. I will see that you get today's last interview." He was accepted.

The Canadian government paid the cost of transport of my father to Canada, but would not pay for the family. I understand that they were not bringing in single people, nor people whose families would not emigrate. My mother had to affirm to the consular officer that she and the family would join him Canada. They were looking not just for skilled tradesmen, but were looking for families that would emigrate.

Q: Yes. Canada is very aggressive in that.

COLESHILL: Yes. I guess my folks must have known this which why my mother went to the Consulate with him. For whatever reason neither grandmothers could (or perhaps would) take care of us that day, so we were taken along. It was the kindly secretary who

took pity on my father and who felt my sister and I were cute and well behaved that he actually got in for the interview and was then accepted.

My father left Germany in October 1951 and was sent to Quebec. The United States was always his objective; Canada was only a way station. The problem of learning French bothered him. He mentioned to his French tutor that living in French-speaking Canada wasn't really what he wanted. The tutor said, "Go to whoever the head of the program is that brought you here and tell him you want to go to English-speaking Canada." My dad was flabbergasted that it could be as simple as that! He and his best friend talked about this and said, "Okay. Well, let's give this a try."

This is so un-German that you would just go say, "I don't really want to be here in Quebec. I'd really rather be somewhere else." But that indeed is what happened. They went to the head of the department in charge of immigrant workers and said, "We'd really like to be in English-speaking Canada," so the guy said, "Oh, okay, let me see what I can do." Three weeks later they were on a train heading to Lindsay, Ontario. That is where we settled. It then took six months for him to save enough money for the family to immigrate to the United States.

Initially my parents asked my maternal grandmother to lend them the money so that we could travel to Canada as a family. She told my mother that this was a cockamamie wild idea. "He'll forget all about going to Canada or anywhere else if you have another child. If he's still talking about it in six months, let him go to get it out of his system. He'll be back here where he belongs in six months with lots of stories to tell." Of course he didn't forget about going. Then about a week or so before he left, my grandmother came along and said, "Here. You can have the money." At that point my father was too proud to take the money and said, "No, thank you."

He saved money, and six months later my mother, my sister and I traveled to Canada. I thought we left from Bremerhaven, but my sister, who probably remembers this better than I do, believes my dad left from Bremerhaven. According to her, we left from Hamburg. Here we were, German speaking, on an Italian ocean-liner heading to English speaking Canada. We were on a ship that had very few German speakers. The crew spoke mostly Italian and some English. Mom remembers a multi-lingual passenger who spoke German, Italian and English who befriended us and helped translate. We landed in Halifax where we took a train to Toronto. We changed trains in Toronto for Lindsay.

At that time German trains stopped only briefly and one had to have luggage ready at the exit and hop off as soon as the train stopped. Passengers opened the doors before the train actually stopped. Of course we had a fair amount of luggage plus my sister and I were carrying fragile dolls that had been farewell gifts from our grandmothers. Mom had her hands full get us and our luggage into the railcar doorway. Once there she could not get the door open because in Canada the door is locked until such time as the train comes to a complete stop. She was worried we were not going to get us and our stuff off the train in time. I had never before, or since, seen my mother so panicked. Then of course the train

stopped, the door opened automatically and a porter came to help us connect to the train to Toronto. The transfer from Toronto to Lindsay was much calmer.

Q: Where is that? Is that far from Toronto?

COLESHILL: It's a little over an hour. It probably was further then than it is now. I have to go back and look at a map. I think it is northeast of Toronto.

Q: How do you spell it?

COLESHILL: L-I-N-D-S-A-Y.

Q: The only place I know up in that area is Guelph. My wife has some cousins.

Q: As we were leaving Germany, Mom said two things about the upcoming trip. She hoped Dad would be at the train station in Lindsay when we arrived. Thinking about that now, how would that have been possible? He knew which ship we were traveling on, but how would he know about the train connections and arrival time? There was no easy, or perhaps affordable, means of communication. If my dad was not at the train station, we were going to take a taxi to the house. I was six years old. I was so hopeful that he would not be at the train station. I had no idea what a taxi was, but I knew I wanted to be in it. At Lindsay my dad was not there so we took a taxi to the boarding house where my dad lived. The landlady came out and told the taxi cab driver to where my dad had moved. It was about half a mile away. Of course my mom had no way of understanding the exchange between the landlady and the taxi driver. It must have been very nerve-wracking. The landlady telephoned my dad's neighbor and said, "Tell Erich his family's here." When we arrived, my dad was standing in front of the house with this big black dog. On the journey from Germany my mother had said: "If he has a dog, I'm walking back to Germany." The first thing out of my dad's mouth was, "He's not mine! He's not mine!" But he may just as well have been. He came with the house! We moved in with my dad and Butchie.

Q: I assume that as a young kid you were about what, five years old then?

COLESHILL: Six. We left Germany on my sixth birthday.

Q: That's a great age to learn a language.

COLESHILL: Sure. By the time I went to school in September, my sister and I were both speaking English. Even though our parents' social life was within the German speaking community, we learned English from the neighborhood kids.

I didn't fully appreciate the difficulty of arriving in a foreign country and not speaking the language until I went to Poland. I went to the grocery store with my little list of things that had been translated. At that time, sugar, rice, salt, flour and oats were all sold in brown paper bags with a rubber stamp on it saying what was in the bag.

My mother of course didn't speak English, but her German friends who had been there longer. One cut the picture Robin Hood from a flour bag and told her that's how she could find the flour. Of course, there was also a semolina Robin Hood brand, and my mother bought a 10-lb bag. When she opened it, she had no idea what she had bought, nor what she would do with it.

I can remember before my sister and I understood English, our parents gave us six empty Coca Cola bottles. We went to the neighborhood store repeating what the neighbor lady told us to say, "Six Cokes, please." We arrived, and being kids, we totally forgot the words. We pushed the empties to the clerk, and the clerk pushed them back. She was not going to give us the refund on the bottles without us buying new bottles I guess. It wasn't until my sister took money out of her pocket that the clerk understood that we wanted to return the bottles and buy six more. Repeat that many times over with anything my mother wanted to buy in the grocery store and it becomes clear how very difficult life was for my parents.

In the very early years my dad insisted that my mother—he and my mother both—learn English. My mother did not want to. My dad used the only lever he could think of, and that was, "Okay, you know these kids are going to have English speaking friends. They're not going to just stay within the German speaking community. You're not going to know what they're talking about. And they're going to be embarrassed to bring their friends in the house because you can't speak English. You have to learn English." It worked. Even though her English was heavily accented – Think Henry Kissinger – she was speaking English in Canada even though almost all her friends were German speaking.

Q: How did you find school there? Had you been to school in Germany by the way?

COLESHILL: No, I had not. I went into first grade in September 1952. My sister and I were already speaking English from playing with Canadian kids. For me it was not a problem. For my sister it was a bit of a problem because she should have been in third grade, and they pushed her back into second. Socially she was older and taller and smarter. That had to have been very difficult for her. What nine-year old is going to make friends with a six- or sever-year old? It did not help her socially. Today no school system would put a child that far back simply because they spoke a foreign language. Besides, her street English was very good. Everything she was learning she had already been taught in the German system, albeit in German. I suppose the teachers didn't think that was good enough. I had no problems with school.

Q: Maybe it has ___ felt it. Was there any difficulty with the Canadians being German? The Canadians of course had fought Germany, and I was wondering whether there was any residue from World War II there that you would deal in the neighborhood.

COLESHILL: Not that I noticed. Again, perhaps I was too young. Alternatively it was probably that our social life was predominantly within the German community.

The principal of our school ran adult evening English classes because there were a lot of German immigrants working for the Canadian Arsenal. The government officially brought in these immigrants. It was a new program and the adult immigrants worked, lived and socialized pretty much among themselves, so the community was pretty accepting, I think.

I remember the principal of our school coming to our house sometimes. He and his wife would come and chat, or bring an English-language newspaper to discuss current events, in English obviously, or sometimes share dinner with us. We had our first Christmas Day dinner at their house. We celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve. The people that we rented the house from were university professors in Toronto, and they maintained a living room, kitchen and bedroom in what would have been our half of the house. They maintained that separately for themselves, so they would come back periodically. We socialized some with them, as well as with the neighbors who rented the other half of the duplex. They had kids our age so it was an easy friendship for my parents to cultivate.

My biggest problem was my mother. I remember being sent to school in the winter having to wear heavy, big, brown stockings. All of the kids in Canada wore pull-up pants, probably corduroy. Girls wore them under their skirts. When they got to school they would pull these off, hang them up in the cloakroom with their coats. And I've got these ugly, brown, thick leggings. I'm going to call them leggings except that leggings implies more like pantyhose, but these were more like long stockings. They were ugly. If I took them off I was barefoot in my shoes. And my hairstyle! She combed our hair in a funny way. She would part my hair on each side of the head, then take the top and turn it into French twist, so you would have this little French twist on the top of your head, while the rest of your hair fell down on the sides. It kept your hair out of your eyes and it was neat and tidy, but it was different. Very different. I was not going to be that different.

In those days we walked to school, so as soon as I got around the corner I would take these damned leggings off and I would pull the comb out of my hair! Messy hair was better than neat, tidy, *different* hair. There were other girls who had messy hair. Unfortunately there weren't any other girls who came to school in the winter with bare legs and no socks. I would put leggings back on around the corner from my home so when I walked in the house I was properly dressed. I could do nothing about my hair. My mother eventually learned what I had been doing. I don't know if my sister squealed on me or if one of the teachers told her because of the bare legs and sockless shoes. My sister was obedient. I guess my dad understood my not wanting to be different from other children. He came to my aid and said I didn't have to wear the leggings; I was then allowed to wear pull-up pants.

Q: In the three years you were in the Canadian school, what were your favorite subjects?

COLESHILL: Oh, boy. That's hard. I'd have to think back on that.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

COLESHILL: I can't recall. I don't think so, certainly not at that age. I still have German books here that my parents obviously read us. I don't read German. I never really learned German at an early age. I don't believe that we went to the public library in Canada. I clearly remember going to the library in Cleveland for children's story time and summer reading programs. I remember reading the entire Nancy Drew mysteries, but that wasn't until somewhat later.

Q: How did you find the Canadian winters?

COLESHILL: I never gave it much thought. It was winter. We had a warm house; warm clothes; plenty of hot food. We still played outside. It was another season. Do I remember German winters being any different? Not really. I suspect we didn't have the mountains of snow in Germany that we had in Lindsay.

Q: How was going to the U.S. come about?

COLESHILL: Well, again my dad and his friend, and particularly Fred Joss, applied for work with one of the automobile companies. I'm not sure how you find out about these things, but he and my dad came to the U.S. to interview for jobs, and therefore, sponsorship. I can remember in the three years there were at least three times when they drove to the United States. Eventually, both men were hired by the Ford Motor Company. Initially, my dad worked in Cleveland at the Ford Motor Plant. We moved to the U.S. in December of 1955, during the Christmas break.

Q: How long did you live in Cleveland?

COLESHILL: In Cleveland, itself, we lived from 1955 to 1958, In 1958 my dad was working at the Chrysler Stamping Plant in Twinsburg, so we moved to Aurora. Today, Aurora is a suburb of Cleveland. In my day it was a small town between Cleveland and Akron.

Q: For you was there much of a difference moving from Canada to the United States?

COLESHILL: To Dad it was a huge difference. I know this partly because I was older, but we moved from a very small town to a big city. My parents continued to socialize with the German-speaking community. It was much more of a big city life. The school was much further away. I could not walk home for lunch so, for the first time, I carried a packed lunch. My parents would never dream of letting me buy cafeteria food when, at home, we had a perfectly good kitchen! For my sister and I, the big change was that my mom went to work.

Q: Did your mother return to her baking skills?

COLESHILL: My mother had no baking skills.

Q: It was your grandmother who had it.

COLESHILL: My mother became a very decent cook and, every year, gained five pounds. She said it was because of the variety of food that was available and she could afford to buy anything she wanted. That probably wasn't strictly true, but she was never going to buy a prime rib or lobster tail, but she bought everything fresh – meat, vegetables, fruit. I never had a tin of vegetables until I went to somebody's house. The only frozen vegetables that she bought at some point when we were in the U.S. were peas and carrots in those little square packets. She would buy those frozen and keep one or two of them in the freezer for just in case she was making a beef stew and she needed something to pop in to it. She never owned a tin of vegetables. If food wasn't fresh and in the market, it wasn't on our table.

Q: You ate well!

COLESHILL: We ate healthy! As I said she became a very decent cook. It was not grand nouveau cuisine, but there was meat at every dinner, a starch, and two fresh vegetables.

Q: What was your neighborhood like in Cleveland?

COLESHILL: We lived at West 110th and Lorain Avenue. , The houses had porches on the front, and the neighbors' house was right next door. Our home was an upstairs-downstairs duplex. Five doors up was Pell's grocery store, a little Mom-and-Pop shop. The street was long, and all the houses were boom, boom, boom, boom, right next door to each other. It is now the ghetto of Cleveland. The houses were built in the 1920s. I can remember the cabbage rose wallpaper. We lived upstairs. We had an American family living downstairs. There was a little one-car garage in the back of the garden, and our garbage was picked up in the alleyway in behind the houses. The garage did not come with our rental. We had a coal furnace and the coal guy came and delivered the coal down the chute. My best friend lived on the other side of the alley on 109th street. Her father was a milkman with Sealtest. We were the only people on the street that did not have milk delivered because my mother thought it too extravagant. When my friend's father finished his milk route, he would offer my mother's a discount on whatever was left on his truck. I believe he had made sure he had enough milk and other dairy products on his truck to take care of us. He always came to the door and stopped and had coffee, partly because Mom insisted on paying him for whatever he delivered because leaving milk on the steps was way too foreign for her.

Q: Oh, yes. Did the milkman have a car or a truck or a horse?

COLESHILL: He had a truck, one like a little van.

Q: How big was your school?

COLESHILL: In Cleveland?

Q: Yes, elementary school.

COLESHILL: I have a class picture, and there had to be about 50 children in the class. We had more than one classroom of kids in the same grade. I think the school was pretty big. I did not know everyone in my third grade class at Willard Elementary School. It was certainly much larger than the school in Aurora where I went from the middle of 6th grade on. I graduated in 1964 and the entire graduating class numbered 63.

Q: What was, you might say, your neighborhood the end of school, the ethnic mix?

COLESHILL: I don't recall anyone being anything but Caucasian. My friends and my parents' friends were white. However, being an immigrant made me a minority. There was no ethnic mix

Q: In elementary school what were your favorite subjects?

COLESHILL: I really liked English classes. I liked reading. In looking at some old report cards not long ago, it was obvious I liked English, reading and Gym. These were my better grades. The report cards showed I did not do well in arithmetic. I needed remedial tutoring in multiplication tables.

Q: Did you get any feel from where your family fell politically?

COLESHILL: No, not until 1960 when John F. Kennedy was running for president. That was the first time politics came up in our household.

Q: Was your family Catholic?

COLESHILL: No. My mother was Catholic. My father was agnostic and he said that the Pope was not welcome in his bedroom. My mother would cook fish on Fridays and would say, "It's Friday. We're having fish today!" My father would chuckle at that because he liked fish. He didn't care if it came up Friday or Tuesday! He humored her, as long as his religious views were the dominant ones in the family. He well understood she was tweaking his nose a bit.

Q: Did the outside world intrude much while you were in Cleveland, whether the Cold War or the developments anywhere? Was this of interest to your family?

COLESHILL: Not that it came to us. I don't know if they expressed their concerns to each other, or if they talked about them with their friends. It was not a subject for dinner table discussion where we always sat and ate together and talked about our days' activities. We did that even after we graduated from high school. As long as you lived at home you ate at the dinner table *en familie*. When my sister and I had after-school activities, and then later, jobs, we had tell my mom the day before when we'd be home. We ate as a family whenever the last person arrived.

The answer was no when we were younger children. I remember many discussions when John F. Kennedy was running for president. We were living in Aurora. The community was largely landed-money folks, white-collar workers, plus numerous Mennonites, many of whom were Republicans. They lived in large, gracious, two-storey, homes with big landscaped gardens. We were very much the outsiders. It wasn't that we weren't welcome. We were different and it showed. Ours was a 1960 ranch-style tract house on an acre of land . We were newcomers; they had lived there for generations.

At home, the conversation was always that Kennedy must win. There was never any discussion about him being a Catholic. Mom once said she couldn't vote for him because he couldn't speak English properly. She had trouble with his New England accent. My dad nearly had a heart attack at the idea that she would not vote Democratic. She wouldn't dare vote Republican. Kennedy was the Democratic candidate and that was that, as far as he was concerned. The first time I heard Kennedy was a Catholic and how could anybody vote for a Catholic president because he would take instructions from the Pope was when I dined at a friend's house. When I carried that message home, I got a lecture about the difference between Nixon and Kennedy; the differences between what the Republican Party stood for versus the Democratic Party; and why we were Democrats.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

COLESHILL: We became US citizens in early September 1960. I assume there was enough time for them to register to vote because they talked about voting. I remember a television announcement that said, "All A's had to register" by a certain date in January. I asked my mother, "If the A's were registering in January, when do the Z's get to register? It was the first time that it became clear to me that we were aliens, that I was not like Patty Pell and Diane Swartz or any of the other kids in my class. Even though I knew we came from Germany and that my grandparents, and aunts, uncles, cousins all lived in Germany, I had not realized we were different until that conversation with my mother over that being an "A." I thought it meant your name was Adams. That had to be before 1960 because it was before we moved to Aurora.
Q: Was your father in a union?

COLESHILL: Oh, yes.

Q: Was the union a strong element within, you might say, the culture of your family?

COLESHILL: Very much so. My dad was a union man through and through.

Q: Did you get involved in passing out leaflets and things of that nature?

COLESHILL: No. I didn't get involved politically until I got to be anti-Vietnam War.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

COLESHILL: We moved to Aurora when I was in sixth grade, and then I graduated from Aurora High school.

Q: By the time you got to high school, you must have felt wholly American, didn't you?

COLESHILL: I felt fully American in third grade. I didn't know I wasn't!

[laughter]

COLESHILL: I'm a blender. I fit in, and I'm not sure that I would say I work hard—consciously work hard—at fitting in, but I fit in. That started right away when we were in Canada, and I was going to look like every other little girl looked like. I was not going to wear my hair in that funny way, and I wasn't going to wear these awful leggings. I actively worked hard at looking like I did.

I can remember my parents telling us that they had bought a house and we were going to move. I said: "How could you afford a house? We don't even have a television." My mother looked me straight in the eye and said, "That's how we can afford a house, because we don't waste money on frivolous stuff." Indeed, it turned out that my parents had a whole lot more money than we ever knew.

They were a shrewd couple. They weren't spending money on wool pleated skirts at age 13 and whatever the popular sweater was. My mother said, "Here's $75. This is you clothing allowance." I was 12 years old. "This money has to buy a coat, shoes, nylons, boots, gloves, your Easter dress if you want something new at Easter. This must last for the entire year." I took my $75.00 and my mother said "Do you want me to take you shopping?" "No, thank you. I'm going with Melanie," so I blew the entire $75.00 in one shopping trip. Winter came, I put my coat on, and my sleeve was halfway up my wrist, and I said, "Oh, Mom! I need a new coat!" She said she would take me shopping. "Get your money?" I had none. She bought me a coat for Christmas and I'm sure she deliberately bought me most practical coat she could find that had no styling. The next year I got $80.00. When I got my $80.00 I made it last halfway through my season, but by the time I got up to $100.00 clothing allowance, I must have been 16. It was only then I was able to make my clothing allowance last.

Q: Has that frugality remained with you?

COLESHILL: You bet! My husband and I owe not a dime to anyone.

Q: These lessons are well learned. It's a little hard at the time.

COLESHILL: I didn't know it was hard; it just was. I just chuckled when I got that brown coat because I knew exactly what she was doing! It wasn't the ugliest coat on the rack, but it surely was the most practical. I probably got the warmest coat available and for a reasonable amount of money. She didn't buy the cheapest coat, but she bought a

very sturdy, practical coat. As it turned out, I wore that coat for two years which allowed me to buy more things the following year.

I remember pleated skirts, the fall pleated skirts in gold. Harvest gold was all the rage along with boat neck sweaters with big stripes. I mean bold stripes, and it would be gold and black. Purple was the other vogue color that year. I wanted them badly. I bought myself a gold pleated skirt and a boat neck sweater. Both items had to be dry- cleaned. No. The sweater had to be hand washed, but the skirt had to be dry-cleaned. My mother just said, "Well, if you cut off the tags, you'll own that skirt. Just remember that you're going to have to pay for the dry cleaning. I'm not paying for the dry cleaning. The sweater has to be hand washed, and then you lay it flat to dry. That's going to be your job. I'll wash anything that you can put into the washing machine. If you throw this in the laundry hamper and I wash it and it shrinks or it bleeds, it's not my fault. You have to learn to take care of your own things. You want these things? You take care of them."

I left the tag on that skirt, I kid you not, for a week before I decided that I was actually going to keep it and bite the bullet and pay for the dry cleaning. I knew she meant what she said. When the skirt got dirty I had to pay for it. I knew she would never hand wash that sweater. I thought about it and said, "Yes. I want this, it's what everybody else was wearing," Today I would no more wear what everybody else is wearing than put pins in my eyes!

Q: I know it!

COLESHILL: But you have to go through that.

Q: Oh God, yes! I'm just thinking this is probably a good place to stop now, but I'll take this up the next time when we'll talk about high school. You started high school when?

COLESHILL: I started high school in 1960.

Q: '60 to '64?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: We'll pick it up then. Where did you go to high school?

COLESHILL: I went to school in Aurora.

Q: Aurora High?

COLESHILL: Aurora High School. That's it.

Q: This is a good place to stop.

Q: Today is the 31st of January 2012 with Ronnie Coleshill, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. When we left off, you were going to be talking about high school. Again, what years were you in high school?

COLESHILL: 1960 to 1964.

Q: Although you were a kid, did you get caught up in the Kennedy-Nixon business?

COLESHILL: It was the first time that I became politically aware of presidential elections, yes.

Q: Where were you at the time?

COLESHILL: I was living in Aurora Ohio.

Q: Where did you find yourself in the political spectrum?

COLESHILL: On the Democratic side.

Q: Was Aurora pretty Kennedy-ish at that time?

COLESHILL: My dad was a blue-collar worker, he belonged to the UAW, and so he was a very staunch Democrat. All our family friends were democrats, as were most of the folks that lived in our housing development, but the "real" Aurora folks were staunch Republicans.

Q: You had to be 21 to vote then.

COLESHILL: I know, but I don't think *they* could vote. I don't think they were able to vote in the 1960 election. I have to look that up! I got my citizenship with my parents, and I think that was in 1961.

Q: They wouldn't have been able to vote probably.

COLESHILL: I've got it right here. We were naturalized on September 23rd, 1960, so they would have voted in November.

Q: What was your high school like? Was it a big mega school or a standard one or what?

COLESHILL: It was a small, rural school. My graduating class started in 1960 with 62 students. We graduated with 63 students, so it was a very stable population. Obviously it wasn't all 63 of us in the same homeroom. It was very small. Teachers were in charge. I think I got a very decent high school education. I did not go on to college, and survived very well in the business world. I made minister counselor in the Foreign Service because I learned how to study, how to learn, how to apply what you know to life. I can't say I felt that when I graduated from high school or thought, "Oh, wow! I got such a good high

school education I don't need a university degree." But that was the case. As I was working my way through the ranks and looking at some of my peers, I realized I had much better work ethic and study habits or, perhaps the work ethic came from good study habits.

Q: What courses particularly appealed to you?

COLESHILL: The Foreign Service?

Q: No, I mean courses in high school.

COLESHILL: I actually took college prep courses. All my friends took the college prep course and would be going to university. I thought I would too. My mother forced me to take a book keeping course because she was a bookkeeper. I got a "D" in it and everyone fainted dead away. I also took typing because they said whatever I do with the rest of my life typing would come in handy. I took all my English courses and all my science and math, Trig, and geometry, and algebra. I took all of those courses. I was not an "All- A" student as my sister was, but I got all "Bs" because I was more interested in my social life and than academics.

Q: During this time you were in high school, did you read a lot on the side?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: What sort of things were you reading?

COLESHILL: You mean beside the pulp fiction?

Q: Oh, yeah. Well, the pulp fiction, too. I'm a great believer in pulp fiction!

COLESHILL: I've read a lot of pulp fiction. I can remember the first time I read a Harold Robbins book. Someone lent to me, and I hid it under the mattress. My mother found it and laid it on the nightstand. This hide and seek went on for a while. Finally she said to me, "If you're old enough to read this stuff you're old enough to leave it on your night stand. You should buy your own books, and you should not pass this sort of trash around. You shouldn't borrow it from friends, you shouldn't give it to friends and you certainly shouldn't underline the dirty passages and dog-ear the pages."

Q: He wrote <u>The Carpetbaggers</u>, didn't he, among other things?

COLESHILL: Yes, that was the first one that I read!

Q: Oh, yeah. I remember. Oh, yes. For that era that was pretty racy!

COLESHILL: It really was! We read <u>*Catcher in the Rye*</u> as part of our curriculum, and wow! That was an eye opener! As far as reading books, I read some biographies. In high-

school, I read the John Foster Dulles biography. That was assigned reading. Of course we read a lot of the classics, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Red Badge of Courage*.

Q: Ah, yes.

COLESHILL: Those were the reading assignments we had. At home we had the newspaper every day which everyone in the family read and discussed.

Q: What was the newspaper?

COLESHILL: *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

Q: Good paper. Were there any teachers in your high school that you can look back upon and say, "This is really a role model" or "sent me off on the right course?"

COLESHILL: Yes. The teaching staff in Aurora was stable. The same teachers who taught my sister, who is three years older, taught me. Most of them were an institution. They taught in that school for 20-plus years. My friends in Cleveland had a new crop of teachers every year. Mrs. Nichols was one of my favorites. She was the math teacher, from basic algebra through trigonometry and calculus. We were dissecting triangles and asked her why this was going to be important to us. Basically she said all knowledge is good to have and, even though we may not all become architects, knowing some of these things would hold is in good stead for the rest of our lives. She said this without sounding "preachy." She motivated us to want to learn, or at least she motivated me, if not everyone. All of our teachers were very good. Our English teacher, Mr. Fessemeyer, wrote a saying on the board every day. I copied them into my notebook and many decades later found the list and typed it into the computer. I still refer to it occasionally. My favorite? "I have five honest serving men. Their names are Who, What, Where, Why, and When." He never made a big thing about it, it was just written on the board, and it didn't necessarily relate to what we were either reading or writing, but it was food for thought.

Q: While you were in high school, you had the Cuban crises, and the Cold War was certainly, the Berlin wall went up. Did this engage your attention?

COLESHILL: Yes. All of it did. The Cuban crisis was the closest thing that had happened to our soil. My folks thought President Kennedy acted very honorably when he accepted responsibility for the Bay of Pigs fiasco. I remember my dad saying, "Well, it was good that he took responsibility; that he didn't blame the Central Intelligence Agency." I didn't even know what the Central Intelligence Agency was, so I asked, "What's the CIA?' If this is a secret organization, why would my father know about it?

I remember being in the school bus and singing the song, "Please Mr. Postman", The words we sang on the bus were, "Please, Mr. Castro, I Don't Want to Die." Yes, we were quite aware of it and obviously had concerns about it or we would not have made up the song.

The Berlin Wall and the airlift had a direct impact on me. I had a cousin in Germany who married to an American soldier. When the American soldiers' families were evacuated out of Germany, she had to leave, even though she was German. His family did not approve of the marriage and would not take her and her young daughter in. So she came to live with us for about a year. To make room for them, my sister moved into my room and they got hers. That was bad news as you can imagine! Yes, we watched what was going on in Germany particularly with the Berlin Airlift. Germany was our home country, not that we had much to do with Berlin and had no family there. My family was all in the Mannheim area. It was concerning both in terms of what was going on in Germany and what economic and political effect it had in the West.

Q: In high school, the culture keeps changing. What was the social life, the dating life at that particular time?

COLESHILL: My first answer was going to be very normal, but define normal!

Q: I just recall in my time people didn't particularly go steady but shortly thereafter all of a sudden everybody was going steady, and now they're not going steady. I don't know. These things change all the time.

COLESHILL: I went steady, yes. There are a number of things that stand out in my mind. First of all, everybody I dated, I dated from my high school. There was no opportunity for me to meet someone else. When I had a summer job I suppose there was an opportunity to meet people, but most of them men I met there were older — too old. I didn't date from out of high school until my senior year. I belonged to the journalism club, the girls' athletic association, and so we were the cheerleaders. High school sports were a big thing and not just for the boys. Before we went steady, he would give you his sweater, you know, the letter sweater, and you wore that with great pride and yes, you got his class ring when he was a junior, so we would wear it on chain around our neck. The young man would come to the house. He couldn't wait outside and 'honk the horn.' He had to ring the doorbell. My father always answered the door and invited the young man into the home. Then he sat and made small talk with my dad and mom.

Q: God do I remember those days!

COLESHILL: It was interesting because I did not have a curfew. My father said that as a reasonable young person, and I should know what time to come home. If I went roller-skating at 4 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, which was a school night, to have an 11:30 or 12 o'clock curfew would not be reasonable. So there was no curfew.

I remember my second date. The young man said to me, "So what time do you have to be in?" I said, "I don't have a curfew," and he looked at me and said, "Well, Hot Damn!" [laughter] I thought, "That was the wrong thing to say."

I established my own curfew. When the question invariably came up, "What time do you have to be in?" I would know to say. If we were going to a movie and had pizza and coke afterward, I would say I had be home by 10:30 or 11:00 at the latest. Yet when we went to a dance that didn't end until midnight, then I could be home at 1:00. I learned very quickly to announce what my own curfew was because otherwise they thought that anything goes, and nothing went!

There was one girl in our class who got pregnant, and we were all shocked because we were all virgins, or at least so I thought. Nobody did drugs. Our big sin was smoking, and since smoking wasn't banned in my house, I didn't need to smoke behind the garage. My dad smoked. He offered me cigarettes. I thought it was vile, so I never smoked.

We went to dances and hayrides, we went to movies, we went roller-skating. Geauga Lake had an amusement park was nearby. We went there in the summer. Later in life I started to ski, so in the winter we went skiing. In the fall we ran up and down hills in our ski boots to get into condition to ski.

Q: In the town and also at the high school, was there much of an ethnic mixture socially? Was it pretty much blue collar or what?

COLESHILL: There was no ethnic diversity at all. We were all white Christians. We had a Mennonite community that did not dance. We had Catholics and Episcopalians. There were no Jews in our community. We were all white. There was not a Hispanic, nor a black. My sister and I were probably the only immigrants. We also had a young man who came from North Carolina. He was probably treated as foreign initially, as I had been treated, because he spoke "funny!"

Most people in Aurora lived in homes on two acres of land. They were very much what I would have called landed gentry at the time. The idea of owning 80 acres and it not being a farm or ranch was foreign to me! Those folk were members of a highly paid professional class. Or at least that's the way it seemed to me when I went to their houses.

We lived in a tract housing development of two parallel streets. Most of the houses had a half to three-quarters of an acre and were three- and four-bedroom ranch style homes. They all looked alike from the outside. By Aurora standards, it was probably considered lower-middle class. Our development has a mix of white people, some blue-collar workers, a policeman, a long-distance truck driver, some accountants and tax-preparers, middle management type folks.

We were in Aurora proper, not a nearby community that was considered being the wrong side of the tracks. The community was mostly blue-collar workers. But as I mentioned, everyone was white.

One Christmas season I took a 3-year old I baby-sat for on the rapid transit from Shaker Heights to downtown Cleveland to see Santa. When we got on the train, the little guy said "Oh look, Ronnie, chocolate people!" I was mortified. A big, black woman, called him

over, sat him on her lap, hugged him, and told him stories all the way to Cleveland. When he arrived at home, he talked more about her than he did about Santa.

I didn't realize my parents were prejudiced until I joined the Foreign Service because the subject just never came up. There were never any racial slurs uttered in our house. They simply insulated — or perhaps better put — isolated us from any sort of diversity. The first time that I realized they were prejudiced was when I showed the photos of a farewell party I hosted in Washington for a Foreign Service colleague who was going overseas. The photos showed black guests as well as the guest of honor. Mom commented that she didn't bring me up to socialize with black folks. I thought, "My goodness! How is it that it's taken me 25 years to really understand my parents." It was simple. It was the first time I had an interaction with people of different ethnic backgrounds.

Q: Did you have much of an accent? You were too young to have a German accent.

COLESHILL: No, I didn't have an accent. I can't even put on a German accent. I speak German with a very strong American accent.

Q: During the Kennedy period while you were in high school, the civil rights movement was initiated.

COLE SHILL: It was news. That's all.

Q: It was news.

COLESHILL: It was news, right. Likewise, the Watts riots and the Chicago riots. That was news.

Q: That was just happening somewhere over there.

COLESHILL: Right. It was news, and it was sort of, "Tsk, tsk!. Do people really think burning cars and smashing windows is going to resolve anything?"

Q: You were going to graduate in '64. Was it purely money or family attitude, your attitude? Why didn't you go on to college?

COLESHILL: Money was one reason. When I told myself parents that I wanted to go to the university, they were a little bit taken aback. My sister had graduated in 1961, with honors. She had been a National Honor Society student and she didn't ask to go to college. She was still living at home, paying rent since right after her graduation.

My dad then explained: "We can pay for you to go to Kent State, but it isn't really fair to your sister because she has been contributing into the family coffers for three years. For us to pay out the money for you go to university, we have to make some accommodations for her. We can do that, but you must understand: One, I'm not going to pay for you to live on campus. You can commute.

" Two, you're going to university to get a degree so that you can get a better job. I don't want to hear that you're going to study Chinese philosophy or poetry. Since I'm paying, I'm going to vet any and all courses that you take.

"Three, you are going to make at least a 3.1 average, because I'm not paying for a mediocre student.

"Four, you're going to graduate. You're going to graduate in four years. If you do not maintain your 3.1 or you do not graduate in four years, you're going to have to pay back every dollar we have invested in your education. For you to go to school and not get a degree is not an option. And, by the way, you're not going to pledge a sorority nor are you going to get married while at university."

There were all these rules. At the time I had a very good summer job. I worked for Crucible Steel. I worked for them summers before, so they knew me pretty well. I mentioned that I might not be going to college and would be looking for full time employment. They said, "Oh, sure! We'll be glad to give you a full time job."

That was the path of least resistance. Crucible Steel then paid for my advanced education, so I took some night classes at Cuyahoga Community College. They also sent me to Cleveland Academy of Professional Secretaries for a three-month program.

Q: In trying to go back to the time, we've talking about mid-'60s, did you have the feeling that there wasn't really much of a real opportunity, the glass ceiling, or women didn't have quite the same opportunity? Did that play any factor?

COLESHILL: Indeed. What did women do in those days? They became teachers, nurses or librarians. I knew I didn't want to teach. I knew I couldn't ever be a nurse, and to be a librarian, well, that's real stereotypical also. That indeed was part of my decision not to go to Kent State. I had friends who went to university. They went to Oberlin, or other smaller liberal arts schools. They were getting an education. It was not necessarily an education to get a better paying job. I couldn't imagine what better paying job I might be able to get and what type of education I would need to prepare for that type of job.

Q: Did the wide world attract you at all or was this sort of beyond your imagination?

COLESHILL: No. The wide world attracted me a great deal. To go back to university, one of the reasons my dad made all these restrictions was that the daughter of a family friend went to university for six years, never graduated, got married, and dropped out of school just before finals. That was part of what made my dad so adamant that, "Hey, you're a girl. You don't need to have an education to be a housewife, but if you're going to go get an education, by God you're going to do something with it."

Then we had another friend. Her sister was in my class, and this girl was in my sister's class. She got a degree in math, and she went to work as a cashier at Sears or Walmart.

What a waste her degree in mathematics was! There were no jobs. My dad saw this, and I saw some of this, too.

Q: There's an awful lot of young women going to college and ending up what they used to call a MRS degree.

COLESHILL: Yes, and he made that exact comment to me. "You are not going to university just to get your MRS degree. You're pretty and you're lively, and you'll find a husband without going to university."

Q: Oh, yes! I'm trying to capture the times because no of course the young women go… College is taking a even a much disproportion part of one's income to pay for it, and most people, if they have any ambition at all, end up getting at least a masters degree. It's a terrible tax on the middle class.

COLESHILL: Indeed. I never understood my parents' finances because, outwardly, we never had as much as my friends did. I never had as many clothes, never went to Jamaica on vacation. Our house never looked as grand as anyone else's, yet he said, "Well, I can send you to college. We can afford for you to go to Kent State. Kent State would mean In-State tuition." He was very up-front about that. "We can pay for this, but it will be a cost to the family." Actually when my mother died at age 78 having lived in a full care nursing home for three years that she paid for, my sister and I still inherited some money. We were flabbergasted at the savings they had accumulated on a tool and die salary and his UAW pension.

Q: Did you at this time start thinking about the government abroad or anything, Peace Corps or anything like that? Did that attract you, or was that beyond your ambitions?

COLESHILL: One other thing. When I graduated from high school I went to work as a secretary. I went to Cleveland Academy for Professional Secretaries to get my secretarial skills up to speed. Then about this time that my sister applied for a job at the UN. They did not take her. In order for her to be a translator or an interpreter, her German had to be much stronger than it was. They looked at her, and they said, "You've got to get your German up to speed and you should have a second foreign language."

She came back from New York very disappointed. My sister was a very good executive secretary. Somehow or another, and I don't know how this came about, there was a discussion with our uncle Martin, who was a vice president for Daimler in Germany, that he would get my sister a job with Daimler. He had worked in Turkey and India to build factories for Daimler. He was now living in Germany. He was most likely very close to retirement. My dad said, "Martin probably does nothing but polish his desk," and was rather dismissive of his brother's vice presidential title.

My dad and my uncle had spoken. Uncle Martin offered my sister a job in Germany with Daimler. She could live with them. At that point I was 19. Rather than sharing my sister's enthusiasm, I thought, "Why on God's earth would you want to move out of your father's

house and into your uncle's house? If I'm going to leave the nest, I'm going to leave the nest." I was the one with grander ideas and a big mouth about what I was going to do with my life!

Things were moving along with my uncle. He was making arrangements to get my sister a job when, one Sunday, there was an item in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. It was an article that U.S. Agency for International Development was coming to Cleveland that coming week to interview potential Foreign Service secretaries. It described what Foreign Service secretaries did, how they served abroad at embassies, etc., etc. It was a very long article. I read it and I thought, "Well, if you want to work abroad, what's wrong with this? This is a real adventure."

When we went to bed that night, I went into her room and showed her the newspaper article. I said, "Did you see this?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, look! Why would you want to go live with Uncle Martin when you can do this?" She and I hatched a plan that she would drop me off at my job and then go on to hers. We both worked in Solon, a small manufacturing town. We dressed up that morning. When we got to our offices we both feigned a toothache. She picked me up, and we went downtown. There was a room full of women applying for secretarial jobs. The paper said they would be there Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The gave us typing tests. I didn't take shorthand at all at that point, but I passed my typing test. Then we were interviewed. My interviewer said, "You have to be 21 to join, and I can pretty well guarantee that you can have a civil service job with U.S. Agency for International Development in Washington then, when you're 21, you can convert to Foreign Service." He told me in order to get a decent grade and step level, I needed to take shorthand at least 80, if not 100 words per minute. "You're just the type of person we want, and we would be delighted to see you come to Washington. You cannot be a Foreign Service secretary. You're not old enough."

Q: You were 19.

COLESHILL: I was 19. I was a bit disappointed. There was no way I was prepared to move to Washington. I was prepared to go to Afghanistan or somewhere with an embassy, but I wasn't prepared to go to Washington. As far as I was concerned I had done my bit. I came with my sister.

My sister was in her interview for what seemed like forever because, I was in and out and had two cups of coffee, long before she was ever out. Not only did they offer her the job; they even told her the posting on the spot.

We didn't go back to work. I think we whiled away the rest of the day at a coffee shop near our house. At dinner that night my dad asked how our day was. There was a pregnant silence. My dad knew us well, so he knew something was up just from the simple matter of, "Oh, it was fine! Nothing happened." He also knew that he would get my sister to break before me. He looked at her and her said, "Oh. What did you do today?" Of course it was really my sister's news to share, so she should have spoken up. However, for the first time in her life she didn't directly answer his question.

I filled in the silence with, “Well, Inge and I went for a job interview with the government.” His response was, “That IS news.” I said, “We saw the ad in yesterday’s newspaper.” He said, “Oh, yes, I saw that.” He read the paper cover to cover. He said, “What was the outcome?” I said, “I’m too young. I can’t get in until I’m 21,” so he looked at my sister, and he said, “And you?” She said, “They offered me a job.” He asked how the interview process went. We told him about the five trillion women applying, so he said to my sister, “Would you rather do this than go to Germany?” and my sister said yes, much to my amazement. He said, “Okay.” Right away she said, “But oh! Uncle Martin has gone to all sorts of trouble.” He said, “He’s glad to do this for you. I can deal with my brother.”

The next morning my sister and I came to the breakfast table to find our dad sitting at the dining room table having a cup of coffee and smoking his cigarette. He is in the one suit he owned. The first question to come to mind was, “Who died?” Why else would he be there on a Tuesday morning? He said, “Nobody died, but I have an appointment today. I’m going downtown.” Even with that my sister and I gave it no thought.

That evening at the dinner table, and my dad said, “I had a very interesting day that you girls might want to hear about.” He said, “I went downtown to talk to the U.S. Agency for International Development recruiter.” He could have blown us over with a feather! He presented himself to the secretary and said, “My daughters were here yesterday, and interviewed for jobs. My elder daughter was led to believe that she had a job offer.” The secretary said, “And their names?” He told them, and she said, “Just a moment, please.” Some guy came out eventually and went over to my dad. He said, “I interviewed your elder daughter. Your younger daughter was interviewed by someone else, but since she turned us down flat, I assume you’re not here to talk about her. You’re here to talk about your elder daughter. Inge.” He invited my dad to wait until 10:15 and have coffee with him.

Not only did they chat for 15 minutes over coffee, the guy then said, “If you’re going to stay, I’m going to have a lunch break at 12:30,” and they had lunch together. My dad came home and said to my sister, “This is what you should do. If they take you, you do this,” and she did. She went to Afghanistan on her first assignment.

Q: My God!

COLESHILL: By the time her clearances came through, we were both working for Cleveland Pneumatic. When she told people she was leaving to join the Foreign Service, we discovered that one of the secretaries in the Executive Office had worked for the U.S. Information Service for a number of years. Suddenly we learned much more about various Foreign Service opportunities even before Inge went to Washington.

So, in 1970 when I decided I was ready to do this, I applied to everyone including State, CIA,, U.S. Agency for International Development, Commerce, Agriculture and Justice. However, I knew I wanted to join was U.S. Information Agency because they were all

over the world, they were a smaller organization, and they did what I felt were more interesting things.

Q: What were you hearing from your sister about her work?

COLESHILL: She went to Kandahar, Afghanistan, and then she was evacuated out of Kandahar up to Kabul, and then went to Islamabad, Pakistan. That was all one tour. Then she went to Nigeria. She loved it. Socially she blossomed. She always a little bit awkward socially. She was having a great time. She met her husband in Nigeria. He was also with U.S. Agency for International Development. They stayed in the Foreign Service until the mid 1990s.

Q: Were you honing some skills while you were waiting, dictation and that sort of thing?

COLESHILL: Yes, I did, but by the time I applied to be a Foreign Service secretary, I was no longer a secretary. I was still at Cleveland Pneumatic and had been promoted to Assistant to the Director for Marketing. We had an office secretary who provided secretarial services to me. She was not my secretary. She was my boss's secretary, but I was not a secretary. But this was the easiest route to get into the Foreign Service.

Q: What were your experiences now in applying as an agent lady of 21 or so?

COLESHILL: I was 24!

Q: Oh, my gosh!

COLESHILL: I waited until I was 24 because I had a full life. I was skiing, I was in love, had a great job, great friends. I did not join the Foreign Service until I was 24 mostly because I was not ready. I was really enjoying the things that I was doing.

Q: The problem particularly for a woman joining the Foreign Service was that by the time she was ready to get into the Foreign Service, she was already part of the mating game. You know, love and all that sort of stuff. That meant long separations, and that usually is the killer. How does that work for you?

COLESHILL: I made the decision to join after I broke up with someone, but I wasn't suffering some big heartbreak. It was just a good time because I didn't have a steady boyfriend at that time. I was told I would spend a year in Washington, but it didn't quite happen that way. I met a guy; we fell in love; we got engaged; and then I was offered Warsaw, Poland some five months after I arrived in Washington. Rick, my fiancé, was very supportive of my taking the assignment. It was my dream and he didn't want me to forego it for him. The plan was that I would go to Warsaw, do my one tour, and this would be my grand fling in life, then I would come home, get married and have babies. We were going to vacation together half way through my 18-month tour in Denmark. That was what the plan. But six weeks after arriving in Warsaw I knew I was going to take another assignment and not go home to marry Rick or anyone else.

Q: Let's talk about this initial job. How did this information agency treat you? Did you get any feel for it when you came in? How did they receive you?

COLESHILL: It was unlike when my sister joined U.S. Agency for International Development. She joined with a whole bunch of other women who were becoming Foreign Service secretaries. They went through a three-month training program in Washington, so they all lived together at Cherry Towers, practically across the street from the State Department. Three of them that shared an apartment, and there were many more of them. I'm not sure that they called it a class, but there were a whole group of them. When I joined the U.S. Information Agency, I was the only new employee that week. I was processed in to become a new employee the first morning then was sent to another office to get a job assignment. I did not have that sense of camaraderie. That sense of a group joining together, the way the A100 class does.

Q: It's a bonding experience.

COLESHILL: Right. I didn't know anything about that until actually I went to work at the Board of Examiners where I learned more about bonding. I had none of that. At the Board of Examiners there was another young woman who had worked for another government agency, and she became a Foreign Service secretary. We had real jobs. We were not in any sort of a training program. Certainly I had visited my sister while she was in Washington, and met her roommates and some of her other colleagues. She talked about some of the things they did together both professionally and personally. But I still didn't know it and experience it, so I didn't actually miss it.

I knew that there was another model. I stayed at the Board of Examiners, and worked for the U.S. Information Agency panel. We were over in Rosslyn, and U.S. Information Agency was at 18th and Pennsylvania. I got a phone call from my career counselor. She said, "Come over. I'm ready to talk about an overseas assignment for you." There was no bidding process at that time. She said, "I see you're interested in serving in Asia. I have a perfect job for you. One year in Vietnam, and then you'll be direct posted to Singapore for your onward assignment."

I sat there utterly stunned because I could not go to Vietnam. The one thing true about all of this political turmoil with the Vietnam War was that my dad was so glad that he did not have boys. He didn't have to come down on one side of the war or the other. As far as he was concerned it was not a legal war. Congress did not declare war. Secondly, it was a stupid war because what in the hell were we fighting for? He could sympathize with his friends whether their sons moved to Sweden or Canada or went to war. Your country calls: You do your duty. But it was, as far as he was concerned, a dirty duty. He could be very sympathetic to both sides of the issue because not having sons he did not have a dog in that fight, so to speak. I could not see myself coming home and saying, "Well, Daddy, I'm going to Vietnam."

I looked at this woman and said, “I can’t go to Vietnam.” She said, “We are force assigning people to Vietnam.” I said, “Well, that is the decision I will have to resign. I cannot go to Vietnam.” I told you the story about my dad’s feeling so I said, “I can’t do that.” She said, “Okay, let me see what I can do.” I went back to work at the other side of the Potomac. Some weeks later I got another call. “Come over and talk about your onward assignment.” She let me know in no uncertain terms I had blotted my copybook for not taking Vietnam but, she personally was going to save my career. I was offered a position on my second choice on my preference list — Africa.

She had the perfect job for me in Africa. It was in Liberia. I’m the perfect person for this perfect job in perfect Monrovia. I didn’t even know where Liberia is, never mind Monrovia. I went back to the Board of Examiners, and told Bernie Lavin, my boss, about my assignment. Bernie pulled down a Africa map and pointed to Liberia, told me the story of how Liberia got established by citizens of the United States as a colony for former African slaves and their free black descendants, that the capital is named after President Monroe and that the official currency is the U.S. dollar.

In mid sentence he stopped, and he said, “They have assigned you to U.S. Information Service Monrovia, not to the Voice of America relay station.” I said, “I don’t know. She didn’t say.” He said, “You don’t want to go to the relay station; it’s 80 miles outside of town on a dirt track. You’re going to be the only single person at the relay station. You want to make sure that you have been assigned to the embassy in Monrovia.” I said, “Okay, how do I figure that out?” He said, “Well, call your career counselor and ask!”

So I did. I called my career counselor and I said, “About my assignment to Monrovia. I have been assigned to the embassy in Monrovia and not to the relay station, correct?” She said, “Yeah, I know. You’d have to resign if it was the relay station. I’ll call you back,” and she hung up the phone! [laughter]

I told Bernie “I think I was assigned to the Voice of America relay station. I expect they’re going to make me resign.” He said, “Well, I have an appointment over there later tomorrow afternoon. I will scout around.” He came back, and he said, “Oh, yes. Your career counselor is really angry with you. She thought she had a live one for two hard to fill assignments.” Then he said, “But you’ll be offered something else. I talked with the head of personnel, and they’re not going ask for your resignation. They know that they will lose too much if they make you resign. You’ll get offered something else.”
Sure enough, several weeks she called and said, “You have two choices. You can go to Berlin or you can go to Warsaw. Call me back.” Click.

Again I went to Bernie who was a great mentor and told him of my two choices. He said, “Well, let me guess. I bet that it’s East Berlin and not West Berlin, and if you call her and ask her, she’s only going to get angry with you. In either case, both of our missions in Berlin are so large you are going to be sharpening pencils. You would be far better off taking the job in Warsaw. It’s not so overstaffed, and you’ll have an opportunity to participate in our programs and do something meaningful.” I took him at his word, and I called back and said, “Yes! I’m happy to go to Warsaw.”

Q: Why don't you go back a little? I realize you were doing basically a secretarial job, but what were you picking up from the recruiting process with the board of examiners?

COLESHILL: I learned the process of how people got into the Foreign Service. I reviewed résumés, looked at test results. I typed the examiners' notes on candidate's oral examination. It was interesting why some passed and others failed. You know, you have to take the Foreign Service exam, and those scores were on their files. Seeing the candidates' varied background was really interesting. Everybody had a university degree. One successful candidate had a degree in park services, recreation services, and she wanted to go to work for the national park services and thought this would be more fun! She passed the oral.

Q: One of our eminent diplomats Phil Habib had a degree from Iowa State in forestry.

COLESHILL: Yes! Bernie and I talked about that. Bernie never said to me, "Oh, Ronnie, you're too good to be a secretary." I always thought that was one of the most demeaning things a man could say to a woman who was a secretary. There are so many ways of phrasing that. Bernie encouraged me. He said, "You're a very good secretary, and when you go overseas, and you'll prove yourself to be a very good secretary. But learn what our programs are all about and help implement the programs. Don't just type the correspondence."

That was really sound advice. I hadn't been in Poland a week when, suddenly, everyone locked their safes. "Oh! They're going to the staff meeting," was the response to my query. I start putting my things away, and one of the junior officers said to me, "Oh! You don't go to the staff meetings." I said, "I'm not a member of the staff?" The public affairs officer (my boss) was standing there so I asked, "I'm not a member of the staff? How can I know what's going on with our programs if I'm not there?" Jock said "Oh, of course, Ronnie. If you want to come to the staff meeting, you're certainly welcome." I asked, "If the secretary doesn't come, who takes the minutes?" He looked at me and said, "Minutes?"

I went to the staff meeting, took the minutes, noted actions assigned, due dates, follow-up items. I typed it up and gave it to the public affairs officer. It was like: Wow! This was a whole new world for him. I couldn't believe I was going to be told I wasn't going to the staff meeting. Then I learned that many secretaries didn't want to go to the staff meetings. "I don't want to go. There's nothing's in it for me. I have more important things to do at my desk." Yes, like what? Write letters home?

Q: In a lot of things there's a self-selection process that people aren't aware of this happening, but they're selecting themselves either in or out.

COLESHILL: Yes, and I selected myself in. Later when I became an executive officer, I had other executive officers say, "why do you get so involved in programming?" If I don't understand what we're doing, how am I going to allocate the money properly? If I

don't know what's in our country plan which is equivalent to the State's planning process, whatever that is called, but if I don't understand what our objectives are, how am I going to allocate resources? How am I going to advise public affairs officers what to do with their discretionary money? Let me tell you, U.S. Information Agency officers had much more discretionary money than State Department people. I never understood that I'm here and I'm going to support you, but I'm not interested in what we're all about.

Q: Again I want to take you back just a little more to the… On the selection panel did you get any feel for the people who were coming up? Did you talk to them at all, the people who were taking the exam?

COLESHILL: A little bit because they would be waiting in my space. They would arrive, and they would sit. There was a little reception area where my desk was. Of course I said hello, and we would chat. Not that I had or was ever asked my opinion on any one of these people, but it would be interesting because there were people that were very charming and very delightful, and I thought, "Oh, this person will pass," and she didn't. Or I'd think, "This person will pass," and find that they had a very high score , like 98 or something, but I certainly was not consistent in picking who would and who wouldn't. Certainly more men passed than women, and we had a couple come, and he passed and she did not. The coffee conversation was, "Well, we are going to get both of them anyway."

Q: We used to talk about " twofers." Two for the price of one! It was a period where if a woman got married she automatically resigned. There was no effort made to assign married people to either the same post or adjoining posts.

COLESHILL: Right. My sister married in 1970 and had to resign. She was in Nigeria. Then they hired her back at a Nigerian pay scale doing her old job.

Q: Oh, boy.

COLESHILL: That was in… She got married in 1970.

Q: When you went out to Poland, when did you go?

COLESHILL: February 1972.

Q: What was the situation in Poland at the time?

COLESHILL: The food riots had ended in what, December 1970, Edward Gierek replaced Gomulka. When I arrived, it was the middle of winter. It was cold. It was dark. I was convinced there was no Polish word for sunshine because they didn't have a need for the word. There was no fresh produce on the market, some gnarled old beets, some old potatoes, and some cabbage, that was about it. We had one meatless day a week. You couldn't buy any meat in the stores nor could you order meat in a restaurant. We could shop at the diplomatic meat market, but even the diplomatic meat market couldn't sell

meat on I believe it was Friday. By the time I left in October of '73 we were up to two meatless days.

It was better for Americans because we had that excess currency. The unofficial exchange rate was sixty-five to one. The real exchange rate was around nineteen to one, so everything was very cheap for us, but finding anything was interesting. One month stores would have wastebaskets and brooms. If you didn't buy then, seven weeks later when all the wastebaskets and brooms were gone, the stores would have dish drainers and something else. The economy was really weird.

It was the same with consumable items. I had never lived with food shortages so, the idea of having tons of sugar, but no flour one month, then tons of flour and no sugar the next, was an unnerving experience. We just never lived like that. And everything came in brown paper bags with a rubber stamp on it. One day I bought a small bag of sugar that turned out to be a big bag of salt, mislabeled. It was the first time in my life I really empathized with my mom arriving in Canada not speaking a word of English. How she managed is a marvel.

Because I was the lowest paid employee—the lowest paid American employee—I didn't shop much at the commissary. It was much more expensive than the local market. For example every morning I went to a local shop across the street from my apartment and bought a pint of milk. It wasn't pasteurized so I boiled it before using it in my coffee. What little milk was left at the end of the day went into the dog's bowl.

Q: Oh, gosh. Who was the ambassador, and who was your boss?

COLESHILL: The ambassador was Walter Stoessel, and my boss was Jock Shirley, John W. Shirley.

Q: These are two names quite renowned in the diplomatic business.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: How was Jock Shirley?

COLESHILL: I liked working for Jock. He knew his stuff, and then Len Baldyga replaced him. Len Baldyga was also a very good public affairs officer without being quite as flamboyant as Jock. Jock was a big name at the U.S. Information Agency. He eventually became Ambassador to Tanzania, long before we were absorbed into the State Department. Jock was one of the people who at one time said, "We need to find a way to get you out of the secretarial area." He didn't say, "You're too good to be a secretary." I always believed that to be demeaning. That's saying that being a secretary is being a second-class citizen. The truth of the matter, it was.

Q: I know it was saying it but the Foreign Service in broad terms is very rank conscious. I spent 30 years essentially as a consular officer. They used to say there was substantive

and non-substantive work. Somehow the protection of Americans and helping people immigrate was considered not of the substance. Very demeaning.

COLESHILL: Yes. I'm sure that you got some of that, too. Maybe not, "Oh, you surely want to be more than a consular officer."

Q: Oh, yes. I had Inspectors come and say, "Well, we've got to get you out of this," when I was running the consular section, and I was thinking, "Oh, for God's sake. I'm having as much fun as one can have running my own business here, and I don't want to be Number Three." One time I was offered the job in Belgrade when Larry Eagleburger left. I was offered his job, and I didn't take it because I was too happy. Now I feel, "Gee, I could have been secretary of state!" But oh, well.

[laughter]

COLESHILL: You never know!

Q: No, but you're right. It's sort of an old fashioned thing, but you know the problem was they were telling the truth. There was a system where if you we re a secretary… I found, for example, I have not had much success in interviewing secretaries because I'm after what are the atmospherics and what was happening in the country, and I don't get much of that from the ones I've tried. I could have interviewed the wrong people, but the reactions are not one of saying, "Oh, yes, well the political situation is this or that," It's more like, "The shopping was this or…" It's less focused on what I'm particularly interested in.

COLESHILL: I have two little vignettes about Poland. One is we were told we were going to be followed, and was told, "They're not really going to be interested in you, but they're really going to just follow you for a little while to make sure that you are who we say you are, so don't get freaked out over this. If you see them, just pretend you don't see them." I said, "Okay, fine."

One day I'm shopping in Cepelia, the handicraft store, because I arrived in Poland with something like 200 pounds of air-freight and nothing else. I owned no dishes to speak of. I had a few Melmac dishes and Texas Ware tumblers. Everyone entertained me, including the other secretaries, with chinaware, silver and crystal. I had none! This was really early on, and I was out looking for household stuff. I saw this guy behind me and I realized he had been in the first store also. By the third store I knew he was following me, and way too close.

Q: He's probably, just as you're not a top target, He is probably a trainee.

COLESHILL: Right. But he made me nervous because he really was too close. I decided to try to lose him but don't know how. Anyway, I ended up in Cepelia and didn't see him when I arrived. They have beautiful linens with gorgeous hand embroidery. I looked at a tablecloth, and of course it's all in Polish and some German. The clerk held the tablecloth

out, and I tried to measure it from my nose to the end of my arm to see if it's indeed long enough. I made my selection and turned to pay. This guy right was there next to me! I literally freaked out then, and he said to me in perfect English, "Excuse me. Would you help me buy one of those?" He was a Fulbright scholar! [laughter] He had seen me at the club, and when he saw me on the street in the shopping district, he was going to come over and talk to me, but I ran away from him! Of course we had a good hearty laugh about that. I told him, "My God, I thought you were following me!" He said, "I was!" That's how paranoid they made me with their "You're going to be followed."

The other story was I was washing my car. I lived in one of two apartment buildings that shared a driveway. My building faced the street with a locked pedestrian gate. The key was hanging inside the apartment building where six of us singles lived. I was washing my car, and I've got a Cocker Spaniel puppy that I got in Poland.

The puppy was running around, and this guy came up to the pedestrian gate coo-coo-cooing over the dog. I smiled at him, and he pet the dog, and the next thing he reached in and he picked the dog up and started running down the street with my dog. I ran into the building, got the key, opened the rusty lock. I then ran down the street probably yelling, "Stop! Thief". I know I shrieked something because he was stealing my dog!

Because we had two apartment buildings with Americans, we had two policemen in front of our gate. Four buildings down the street was another American apartment building with a policeman at that gate. The policeman at the other gate saw what was going on, so he ran behind thief. This scene looked like a Woody Allen movie: the dog thief, a policeman, me, and another policeman all running down the street screaming something or blowing a whistle.

Somebody finally stopped the thief and the two cops pummeled him. He was on the ground bleeding, and they continued kicking him. Now I'm shrieking because of what's going on, but I've got my dog back at this point. Later the embassy security officer called and said he heard what happened and that I had go to the police department and identify the thief and press charges. I said, "I don't want to press charges!" He said, "You have to press charges. You're not going to be asked to go to court. You're not going to be asked anything. I will pick you up and we'll go to the police department. All you need to say is, 'Yes, this is the man who stole my dog' and as far as we're concerned that's going to be the end of it. And that's what I did. I'm sure the thief did 20 years hard labor, not because he stole a dog but because he stole an American diplomat's dog. That looked bad.

Q: In working there did you get any feel for the work of the embassy and the full thing and also U.S. Information Agency?

COLESHILL: Yes. We got briefings from the Central Intelligence Agency and, for example, one day I went up to the station chief's office to pick something up. The consular officer was standing in the office. We knew that the offices could be bugged. As soon as I walked in and saw Ed standing there, he put his finger to his lips. Oh. Now I knew he was under cover. We were very security conscious.

Q: Did you have much contact with individual Poles?

COLESHILL: No. Remember, we had a no fraternization policy, and I would have no reason to have official contact with Poles. I dated a Fulbright Scholar who could date anybody he wanted and socialized with anybody he wanted, so I met Poles through him. Then of course I had to do a contact report. Of course I'd never knew anyone's last name. I hardly knew their first name, and then it was always the same question: "What were their names? What were their political beliefs?" How do I know? "Where did you meet them?" Sometimes I didn't even know the address of where we were because he took me.

The security officer said, "You're not being very cooperative." I said, "When I got to these parties, do you really want me to take out pencil and paper and say, 'Excuse me, how do you spell your name?' that's going to look really awkward. He said, "Well, I don't want you to go to the parties at all!" I guess I was uncooperative.

I read my security file when I was allowed to see it under the Freedom of Information Act. The analysis at the end of my tour in Poland said I was interesting and I was interested in my environment and that I appeared to be a good worker but should never again be considered for an Eastern European assignment. I thought, "That's fine. I can live with this."

Q: What sort of work were you involved with?

COLESHILL: I answered the phone, made appointments, typed and filed everything that was classified limited official use and higher. I managed two officers' schedules and tried to get myself involved in every program. We had the New York City Ballet with George Balanchine come for three public performances. Then Merce Cunningham, a modern dance company, came and danced to John Cage music that, to me, sounded like the Voice of America radio station being jammed. George Balanchine got rapturous applause from the Polish audience. Half the audience left at Cunningham's intermission.

We had a very active cultural program. The Fifth Dimension came for a concert. Someone forgot to buy them water for their dressing room. I was dispatched to do the needful minutes before the concert started. We also had a very active speaker program.

I managed all the paperwork for our programs. Then I made myself useful wherever I could. When we had these big, big programs I managed the background to make sure that everything was going smoothly. If something or someone was needed, I was happy to be the one to take those assignments. We had a presidential visit.

Q: How did that go?

COLESHILL: Oh, that was my very first experience!

Q: Who was the president by the way?

COLESHILL: Nixon.

Q: How did it go?

COLESHILL: I believe it went very well. President Nixon was opening up China, and was trying to have better relations with Russia and Eastern Europe. I think it went very well.

We were setting up the press center, and somehow the copy machine paper was left behind, so I volunteered to go back to the embassy to get the paper. I had taken a 1968 Dodge Dart convertible with me. I got the copy paper in my car, and drove back to the hotel where the press center was, but now all the roads were blocked! I thought, "How do I do this? I knew I had to get the paper there. I went home, and got my luggage wheels. I put the four boxes of paper on the luggage wheels, parked my car as close as I could to the tram, took the tram, and rolled the paper to the hotel. Then somebody said, "Where have you been?" I said, "I couldn't get back. The roads are closed. Here are four packages. I've got four more in my car. I'll go back and get them." Then they said, "Oh, we havet an embassy driver. He'll take you, and he's got a pass to get back in." That's when I knew the difference between the haves and the have-nots. But my efforts were appreciated.

That was the first dealings with the White House communications people. They came, and set up the red phone, weeks before the President arrived. We were each given a free, 10-minute call via the White House phone. Someone set up a schedule. I was young and schmoozed with the White House Communications guy, so I ended up getting a very, very good time frame. I got 7:00 pm Cleveland time.

The first thing my mom said when she heard my voice was, "Oh, my God. What's wrong?" "Nothing's wrong," and I told her the story about the president's coming and that I was on the White House phone. She said, "Let me get your dad." Dad got on the phone, and so we chatted a bit. We went through the same thing. My mom was on the extension. We had nothing to talk about because were not used to talking on the phone. The phone was always the bearer of bad news. The White House communications guy allowed me twenty minutes instead of ten minutes. I watched the clock closely because I didn't want to abuse this privilege. In under just ten minutes my mother said "We better hang up now, dear. The President might want to use the phone." [laughter] I said, "Right, Mom. Bye!" I often thought, "Was she picturing me sitting on the President's lap?" [laughter]

I enjoyed my 18 months in Poland. It was tough in many ways, but I became a firm believer throughout my entire career if you do not like your first assignment, you better get out because you're not going to like the second or third any better. If you cannot adapt to enjoy what is a new and different life on the first assignment, it doesn't matter how hard or how horrible it would be, if you can't find good things about it, then you're not going to like it any better anywhere else.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop, and we'll pick this up. When did you leave Poland?

COLESHILL: I left Poland in September 1972.

Q: Then where did you go?

COLESHILL: Tokyo.

Q: All right, we'll pick this up in Tokyo in what, 1972?

COLESHILL: 1972 to 1976

Q: Okay, we're in business. I'll make my announcement here. Today is the 10th of February 2012. This interview is with Ronnie Coleshill. We left off, you left Poland and you were off to Tokyo.

COLESHILL: Indeed I was, yes.

Q: When was that?

COLESHILL: That would have been in October of 1972.

Q: How did you get to Tokyo?

COLESHILL: I came home on home leave. Home leave was in the Cleveland, Ohio area, and then I flew to California and flew directly to Tokyo because I had to be there now, now, now, *now* and then, of course, my predecessor stayed on for six weeks.

Q: I usually say, "Oh, why did you come so soon?" That's the typical thing.

COLESHILL: Yes, but it was my second tour, so I didn't know it was possible to have serious discussion about my arrival date.

Q: What was your job?

COLESHILL: I was the deputy public affairs officer's secretary.

Q: You did this from when to when?

COLESHILL: From October 1972 to June 1976.

Q: How stood American-Japanese relations at the time?

COLESHILL: The relations were strained primarily over economic issues. There were also some rumblings about Okinawa, but they weren't as front-page news and serious as they became later. The soldiers were much better behaved. The raping of a Japanese school girl certainly generated huge public outcry and stressed the official relationship, especially since the military didn't turn over the soldier for local prosecution.

Q: Who was ambassador while you were there?

COLESHILL: It was Robert S. Ingersoll. He had been CEO of Borg-Warner. Perhaps President Nixon selected him as his company had joint ventures and licensing arrangements with major Japanese companies.

Q: He was a cabinet member, wasn't he, at one point.

COLESHILL: I don't know.

Q: Who was your boss?

COLESHILL: When I first arrived Alan Carter was the public affairs officer and Francis (Frank) Tenny was the deputy. Then Bill Miller came to be the public affairs officer, and Frank was still there.

Q: What sort of work were you doing?

COLESHILL: Initially I wasn't doing much. This was my biggest complaint about being a Foreign Service secretary. No one really knew how to make good use of a secretary. They used secretaries as typists or file clerks. They did not view a secretary as an administrative assistant. I found the idea, "Here, type this," and then obtaining clearances and filing pretty boring work.

As I said in Poland, I was fortunate because we didn't have such a large staff I was able to insert myself into program activities which were much more enjoyable.

In Tokyo that was a much tougher nut because we had lots of staff. We must have had 22 U.S. Information Agency people around the country. What did we have in Tokyo itself? We had public affairs officer and his deputy, two officers at the American Center, three program development officers, two information officers, three cultural affairs officers, an audio-visual officer, an arts and graphics officer, an American executive officer, and two American secretaries.

Q: I would assume a very able Japanese staff.

COLESHILL: Yes, indeed. Highly-qualified and highly-paid. Except for the front office people -- the public affairs officer and deputy public affairs officer -- everyone else had Japanese secretaries. We had a protocol secretary for the public affairs officer. All the appointments that were made by the protocol secretary, even the appointments within the

embassy, because they had to dovetail with outside appointments. I don't know what the public affairs officer secretary did, but God knows I did very little. I certainly didn't do anything either important or interesting.

After I had been there a year we had a new program development officer. His background was Madison Avenue advertising. Somehow he went to work for the Voice of America and. then a Foreign Service excursion tour. His office was in the front office suite but I wasn't assigned to work for him. I went to him and said, "You know, Grant, I'd be very happy to do some projects for you in my spare time." He looked at me and said, "Like what?" His major responsibility was to coordinate the programs with the Tokyo American Center and our branch posts in Sapporo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka and Kyoto. "I said, "I can help you coordinate those activities." He looked at me and said, "Sure! Of course!" My life got much more interesting, but there were still a problems. The public affairs officer's secretary treated me as if I were her secretary. Certainly I was her backup. She announced, "I'm going to lunch at 12 o'clock, and you need to be here to answer the phones," Or "I'm going to the staff meeting till two o'clock, and you have to be here to answer the phone," yet we had local staff that could and would do that but nope, she made it my job.

Q: Would you put this down as a jealousy or this is just the way she thought?

COLESHILL: I think this is just the way she thought. When she was assigned to Tokyo, she was one of the most senior secretaries in the Foreign Service, having spent 20 plus years working her way to the top of her field. This is probably how she had been treated when she was a young secretary, and she thought this was the way it ought to be.

I was bored silly. That being said, I had a wonderful life, so I wasn't prepared to curtail. I met my first husband there. I was teaching English as a second language at night and making buckets of money and having wonderful experiences so, I put up with it. I cannot say I had a wonderful job.

Q: When you say you were offered to coordinate programs, what does this mean?

COLESHILL: Say Sam Cooke, a visual artist, was coming to Tokyo. We were going to have the art exhibit in Tokyo-American Center from April 1st until September 30th. I would call the public affairs officers at each of the branch posts and ask which dates are they wanted. How long they wanted the exhibit? There were lots of conflicts scheduling activities among six posts. After the exhibit's tour was scheduled, we wanted Sam to do workshops with local artists. The negotiating process began again. Each post wanted to do everything with him: a workshop, a presentation, a representation event, and, of course, each post wanted the artist there to open the exhibit (an impossibility). But eventually it worked out where everybody had a program at the time they could use it. This process was repeated with cultural presentations, speakers, exhibits, and even visitors. I should note here that the program development officers worked with Washington and other Asian posts to bring the type of programs to Japan that would meet our country plan objectives.

Q: Did you get acknowledged for this and allowed time to do this?

COLESHILL: Yes, I did. For openers I could do it at my desk. The biggest issue with the senior secretary was my being at my desk. And yes, I did get acknowledgement for it because after Tokyo I came back to Washington and broke out of the secretarial field.

Q: How receptive were Japanese audiences to American cultural things?

COLESHILL: The Japanese are incredible polite. They would come to the program, they would smile, and they would be very, very polite about it, but you didn't really know whether you were changing opinions or not. But, of course, we believed we were broadening their horizons with the cultural activities. The Japanese really loved American jazz. We didn't do a lot with performing arts because popular artists like Glenn Campbell, Stevie Wonder and the Fifth Dimension, came to Japan on their own steam. There were impresarios who would program them, and they would make lots of money. The cultural affairs officers would know who was coming so the public affairs officer would have a reception, either at his home or at the Residence. We piggybacked on this famous American being there, but we would not actually do the programming. They wouldn't be under State Department cultural presentation programs.

Q: I would think that as so many places, the biggest impact would be from American films.

COLESHILL: Yes. Every year there was an American film festival and a jazz festival.

The other big impact came with the cultural exchange program. The Fulbrighters , who were either scholars or teachers, and the international visitors' program that sent selected Japanese to the U.S. for six weeks to meet their U.S. counterparts. Those programs were very successful. We always had more candidates than we had grants.

Q: How about authors and books? Were there many books translated from English into Japanese, American books, or not?

COLESHILL: It depends on how one defines many. Certainly I know all of Robert Michener's books were. He came to Japan, and we piggybacked on his visit to do some real programs with him. We paid him a small stipend, but he paid his own way to Tokyo. I suspected he was doing some research.

We did not have a book officer. We had an audio-visual officer, and we gave the Voice of America music tapes to the local radio stations. They were reel to reel tapes, and on the reel to reel would be the newest 10 records that hit the top 50 and also the record that was one, two, or three if it wasn't a repeat from the week before. That was given to the radio station.

Q: Did you feel you were tripping over each other?

COLESHILL: We had space, but we were certainly tripping over each other as far as work was concerned. I was on my second tour so no one asked my opinion. If I had voiced it, no one would have given it one moment's thought.

Q: I'm just trying to visualize. Did we have an English program?

COLESHILL: We did not have an English language program when I was there. I don't believe that one ever opened up there.

We did have an American librarian assigned to Tokyo who was responsible for all the American center libraries in Japan.

Throughout the years there's always been a discussion: Does the local population come into the library because it's clean and tidy with a nice bathroom so they can thumb through English magazines? Or, or did they come in to study and learn about something that is American? American center library shelves do not contain the latest American novels. The materials cover American history, economics, government, international property rights, reference materials, and culture. The library contains materials we want the local population to read and absorb.

The conundrum of what to stock in the library and who should be library patrons really hit home to me when I was in Zaire. It was the first time that we, the American officers, ever actually looked at the books and asked, "How many times has this book been checked out?" The answer in Zaire was often, "None." The next obvious question was, "Then what is the function of the library?" The Zairian library staff said we should fill the library with materials the "Zair-wa" wanted to look at such as magazines on wood-working, air conditioning maintenance. That sort of practical stuff. Is that what congress appropriated money to the U.S. Information Agency to do? We measured success by how many column inches of newsprint we got in the local newspapers or by how many people came to the library or our programs. .

At every post it was important to get as many grantees allocations as possible. Washington controlled the grantee budget, but gave posts a number of available grants. The measure of success was being able to use all the grants, and perhaps even have more candidates ready to go if additional grants became available. But finding appropriate grantees could be problematical. Perhaps the right candidate did not have sufficient English language skills, or could not get a visa; would not go if a family member could not accompany him/her, the timing of the program was not convenient or, as in Saudi Arabia, refused to fly economy class or join a group of others. There were lots reasons. But for Washington to consider a post's program successful, the post needed to send as many grantees as possible.

Q: Was the problem of Japanese being a difficult language? Did this create quite a gap would you say in our cultural and public affairs programs? There weren't many Japanese who spoke English or Americans who spoke Japanese?

COLESHILL: Our public affairs officer, our deputy public affairs officer, the American Center directors, and deputy center director, the exchanges officer, the other cultural affairs officer, both information officers all spoke Japanese at a good working level. They studied Japanese one year at the Foreign Service Institute then a second year at the Yokohama language school. The Japanese speakers rotated in and out of language-designated positions in Japan.. A lot of them had Japanese wives. The difficulty was for those of us who didn't speak Japanese. We had an embassy language program and I was able to get around, and I learned how to read the basic kanji where they do it in blocks so I could read the street signs, but I certainly couldn't carry on a conversation with anyone in Japanese. I could order my drink and find the bathroom and order my meal.

English teaching was a big business in Japan. If we were walking around one of the parks anywhere in Japan, young students would approach us — as we were obvious foreigners — and start a conversation with "Excuse me. I'm speaking English. Would you mind practicing English with me while we walk through the park?" We always agreed because it was such fun to hear what they wanted to talk about. It was usually pop culture, what we were doing in Japan, how we liked it and what our parents thought about us living abroad.

There were many English language Institutes in Tokyo. A number of wives had very high paying teaching jobs even though they were not qualified teachers of English as a second language, or even teachers. As native-speakers they were in high demand. I had an English student myself. He was a vice president for Yokohama Rubber and wanted a conversational English teacher. I felt I couldn't take cash, so our arrangement was that he would take me to dinner once a week. In the beginning I would bring a subject matter to the table and the next week he would chose the topic. Eventually our relationship was such that we didn't need the prep work. His daughter spoke English but his wife did not. Nevertheless we became good friends and stayed in contact until his death in the mid-1990s.

Q: Did you get to travel much in Japan?

COLESHILL: I did. Not officially but, personally. I have many fond memories because I had a really, really good time. I joined a ski club on one of the U.S. military bases, and we skied all winter long. I learned to scuba dive. Despite my not liking my job, I extended for a second two-year tour. I loved the country, the Japanese people and my friends at both the American and European embassies. I traveled a lot. I met my first husband at the embassy and we wanted our tours to end at the same time.

Q: While you were there, were there any major visits of presidents or others that you got involved in?

COLESHILL: Secretary of State Henry Kissinger came. I don't think we had a presidential visit. It was my first embassy to be inspected. I told the inspector that my

position should be eliminated. That fell on deaf ears. They did not even make it an informal recommendation, nor did they comment on the fact that I was under employed.

Secretary Kissinger came more than once. One time I was in the elevator at the hotel going up to the hospitality suite where I had been assigned. I was carrying a shorthand pad for whatever reason. He was on the elevator by himself and asked me, "Do you take shorthand? Come with me!" The next thing you know, he is dictating as we were walking down the hall. [laughter} He had just come from the meeting with the Japanese foreign minister, and he was dictating his notes! His secretary was not very happy to find that she had been usurped! I think she was only usurped because I had been standing there in the elevator with him.

He was an interesting man. He was very appreciative and very polite, and I had difficulty understanding some of what he was saying, but he was very patient. That was sort of fun!

Q: Where did you go after that?

COLESHILL: After that I came back to Washington and I married. My husband was from the Embassy's defense attaché's office. I was probably going to resign or switch over to the civil service, have babies and do the sort of normal things.

I was in Washington from 1976 to 1979. In one of my evaluations from Tokyo, I was chastised for complaining that I was not busy enough. Of course the comment made me furious, but my mentor cautioned me not to vent in my personal comments on the evaluation. He advised that I merely comment on the things I was doing outside my normal duties. It was probably the best advice I had since being told not to accept the position at the Voice of America relay station in Liberia.

I was interviewed for a position with an office that organized the programs for overseas. It was called administrative assistant rather than secretary. When the office director read the evaluation that I "chafed" when I wasn't busy, he said, "I want to interview this woman." I got the job.

That was my upward mobility opportunity. They offered me a year at a University. For personal reasons I turned down this opportunity to take the Saudi Arabia assignment as Executive Officer in Jeddah. Professionally, I figured that was worth more than a university year as I wouldn't get my degree in one year. Instead I did my three years in Washington, and then I went to Saudi Arabia.

Q: How did you find Washington, the bureaucracy and all?

COLESHILL: The U.S. Information Agency didn't have the same level of bureaucracy as State Department. I had a great job, and I had a great boss. If I had a complaint it was about some of the civil service employees. I did not find them as committed or as professional as Foreign Service staff. That certainly didn't mean everybody, but of the clerks and secretaries whom I was supervising. That was hard work.

Q: How did you see public affairs as a career by this time?

COLESHILL: I believe public diplomacy is one of the most important aspects of embassy work. The fact that we weren't truly part of the embassy was a problem. It wasn't so much that we believed ourselves to be above the embassy, but different from the embassy. We had our own budget, our own infrastructure, our own legislative rules and regulations. I could see that this was going to be a problem in the long run. We would send our country plan to the ambassador for approval, but we were not integrated thematically in any real serious way. And the embassy's mission program plan did not incorporate much from our country plan.

If the U.S. government doesn't have an educational and cultural component in their diplomacy, we're never going to win the hearts and minds of anybody. I think the consolidation process into the State Department was very poor. Had it not been for Colin Powell and the Iraq war, USIA would have been buried in the Department basement with insufficient money to do anything meaningful. What was it that George W. Bush said? The U.S, government is not in the "nation building" business. I think that's wrong. Perhaps I would not use the words "nation building," but let's be honest, the U.S. government wants to influence world leaders and public opinion to be more democratic and less autocratic. It is a noble idea.
[long pause]

COLESHILL: Are you ready?

Q: I am writing down. I'm trying to think… To move on, where did you… Did you have an overall plan now that you were married? How was this going to work out?

COLESHILL: The marriage wasn't wonderful from the beginning. It was a mistake. The first threat was when I was offered the university year. He felt threatened. He resented the fact that I really liked my job, and he resented the fact that I was becoming more successful with my job. It didn't mean that he wasn't successful with his, but he didn't like his. He was never happy. He was a job-hopper. Since he had been in the military 12 years, it never occurred to me that he was a job-hopper. When this thing with the university year came up he said, "Well, I will move out and you go to university because then I won't interrupt you while you're studying," and cut it off.

I didn't actually get married to get divorced, and certainly not within the first three years!. While in the Near Middle East Bureau, I did some work for Jon Stewart, who was the public affairs officer in Riyadh. Jon was bringing Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, who eventually became King Abdullah, to New Orleans to see the Mohammad Ali-Leon Spinks boxing match. I made the hotel reservations, I booked a dinner at a very good restaurant for them, I got the tickets for the fight, organized a fruit basket and flowers for the Prince's suite, arranged limousine service, that sort of stuff. They had great seats for the fight. If I recall correctly Mohammad Ali won.

Jon came back to Washington ecstatic. He and I had never met, so he took me to coffee and was very appreciative of everything I had done, especially since I had only been asked to make hotel reservations and get the tickets. The conversation then turned to the fact that I had bid on the executive officer position in Saudi Arabia. I was just making idle conversation. He said, "Well, maybe we could find something else for you to do in Saudi." He asked Washington if they would assign me to be the exchanges officer.

I didn't see this as a career path for me. Managing the exchange program is chiefly a logistical job that I could do very comfortably. But exchanges in part of the cultural affairs portfolio and only large posts had an officer dedicated to the exchanges program. I did not think I had the background to be a good cultural affairs officer. There were executive officers in some small and medium posts and in every large post. I believed I could be a good executive officer and aspired to the senior positions in Tokyo, New Delhi or Brasilia. That is a career path. And the university year was still on the table. He said, "Well, that's all really very good, but you are at the point where you need to be at the right job."

Lo and behold! His executive officer had a stroke or heart attack and was returned to Washington. He called me with this news and asked me to bid on Saudi. By this time the whole university year offer had been losing its luster, and so I asked to my husband what he thought. Someone had told to him getting a job in Saudi Arabia was "like falling off a log", so he said, "All right. Let's go to Saudi," so we did.

For my career, this decision was the single smartest decision I made. Jon Stewart was a fabulous mentor. It was a wonderful Job. I had wonderful deputy—a Pakistani —who taught me everything he knew. I had a couple weeks of intense training in Washington with post's budget officer. Between my own organizational skills, the processes I learned from Rashid Abid, and Jon Stewart's support made me a very confident executive officer. Jon insisted I remove the typewriter from my desk because "If you have a typewriter, the rest of the staff is going to treat you like a secretary." I shared an office with Rashid and he said, "I want you to find an office, find a good way to give Rashid his private space. You need to be in this office yourself. Look around you. No other American shares an office with his or her local deputy." I followed his advice, and he was very right.

Q: Could you explain what an executive officer does? Put it in the Saudi context.

COLESHILL: In Saudi Arabia we had a consulate in Dhahran where we had a branch public affairs officer and a small third-country national staff. We had a larger public affairs office in Riyadh in anticipation of the embassy moving to Riyadh. They had the public affairs officer, a deputy, two cultural affairs officer and an American secretary. In Jeddah we had the deputy public affairs officer, a cultural affairs officer and the executive officer. No Saudi nationals worked for the American embassy. All our local employees were third-country nationals — Egyptian, Yemeni, Palestinian, etc.

All these positions are taken care of by the Executive Officer just as the Administrative (or Management as it's now called) Officer would take care of the State Department

officers in the embassy. On a much smaller scale I managed, everything from the budget to our motor pool, representation funds and activities, procurement, grants management, and security. In short I ensured that the public affairs staff had all the needed resources to mount successful public affairs programs that supported country plan objectives.

We had our budget and I worked with Washington to ensure that all our needs (and some of our wants) were met. We took care of our own local staff, both in terms of salary and evaluation processes and hiring. I worked with the personnel officer to make sure I was following the rules and regulations, and she never hired nor fired, anyone for U.S. Information Service. That was my job.

We ran programs so I divided the program money between Riyadh, Jeddah and Dhahran. If we didn't have enough, I would try to reduce or defer some of our fixed costs to enable us to reprogram those funds. We had rules and regulations that had to be followed. They mirrored State Department's, but were codified in our manual of operations. Then of course I had to report back to Washington on all our budget exercises, and we had quarterly budgets that had to be filed.

I made sure that we had people, equipment, infrastructure, and housing. People went off on R&R. We cut travel orders. The only orders we did not do was if you went on emergency evacuation if you were sick. The State Department's personnel officer had to prepare those. If our staff traveled anywhere, even on home leave and return, in those days, we would prepare the orders. Washington would send a cable authorizing me to do that, and we cut the orders.

Q: Where was the major emphasis in Saudi Arabia? We had an awful amount of students, Saudi students, in the United States. There must have been an awful amount of exposure to American culture there.

COLESHILL: Not really. Even though a lot of young men studied in the U.S. or the U.K, the country was very closed. There were no foreign films. The most controversial thing on local TV was an Egyptian-produced soap opera. There was a big flap when a woman newsreader was introduced on the evening news. The religious police took censorship to a new art form. All foodstuffs were imported. On the McCormick bottle of sage, the word "pork" was blacked out on the back of the label imprinted with, "Good with chicken, etc." Can you imagine how labor intensive this little task was all around the country on every imported product that might use the word "pork"?

To go back to students wanting to study in the U.S., we had a part-time resident-American student advisor who helped prospective students understand minimum requirements, placement tests, English tests, how to select a university, how to prepare the application and admittance process and immigration process. No Saudi student needed financial aid. The student advisor rarely knew if a prospective student was serious enough to apply or be accepted. So there was little she could do in the way of preparing them for life in the U.S. unless the prospective student asked specific cross-cultural questions.

We did better preparing Fulbright scholars for what they might encounter once in the U.S.

Q: I had an Austrian friend. He was a Fulbright student in Des Moines, Iowa. He used to wonder why he came home hungry after having been invited to an American home?. Finally after three or four trips he realized that in Austria they say, "Oh, have some more," and you say, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, thank you." Then they'd say, "Have some more," and then you'd take some. In Austria they'd ask three times. In America we ask twice! There are all sorts of little things.

COLESHILL: Yes. Of course the Saudis don't eat pork, any sort of pork product, so we said it's all right for them to say, "Is there any pork in this dish?" If the hostess said, "No, there is no pork," you shouldn't say, "No bacon grease either?" That becomes insulting. Don't make an issue of pork..

I had no Saudi friends, just lots of Saudi contacts. If I had a representational activity with more than one Saudi being present, they would not drink alcohol. Of course, I never served pork to any Muslim in any country. But if I had a small dinner, for example, with only one Saudi couple, he (certainly not the wife) would drink liquor and sometimes even say, "Oh, we were hoping you'd serve bacon tonight." Not on your life! Or if they were offered a non-alcoholic drink they'd say, "Don't you have any scotch." They would never drink alcohol in front of another Saudi national.

Q: No. Tell me, as you got into this management responsibility, as portrayed so often, did you think there was a glass ceiling for women particularly in the U.S. Information Agency at the time?

COLESHILL: No. I never looked at my future and thought I was only going so far with my life or with my career. I worked hard and expected success to come my way. USIA had a woman public affairs officer in Paris. That's very, very senior. At the time that position was more prestigious than being an Ambassador many small countries. Of course there were women ambassadors. Remember, I did not have a college degree so perhaps I didn't have such high aspirations at the time. What I did see was stereotypical I saw attitudes.

My husband and I had been Saudi Arabia about a year and a half when he got a job with Daniel Corporation. They were a big construction company. We arrived in 1979, so this would have been in 1980, early 1981, and the station chief asked to him at a party, "How does it feel to be a house mouse?" My ex-husband truly reacted to that. He talked about that for months. He's probably still telling this story. He was really, *really* offended. At the time with Daniel Corporation he was earning $100,000 plus some perks. That's when a hundred thousand was real money.

Q: That was a real…

COLESHILL: That's right. He was making a hundred thousand dollars. I asked him why he just did say, "I wouldn't know." I didn't understand why this irritated him to distraction. He said that it was because that was the prevailing attitude within the embassy. Someone else who had some idea that he was very well paid said to him one day, "Well, if you didn't have a wife on assignment in the embassy, you wouldn't have a job like this." You know what? That was a true statement, nevertheless, he hated it.

We were into our fifth year when Daniel offered my ex-husband a new position in Dhahran. There was no position for me in Dhahran as it was a small consulate. He wanted me to quit the Foreign Service and become his happy little housewife. I was not prepared to do that though I was prepared to ask for a year's leave without pay to see how this thing with Daniel played out. There was no job security with Daniel and I needed to be convinced that he was committed to Daniel if they were to him. I thought this was a reasonable compromise; he thought I wasn't being supportive of him or his career aspirations.

Near the end of five years we left Saudi and went to Kenya. He got one of the embassy jobs reserved for spouses. The program was called "part-time, intermittent, temporary," (PIT for short – or perhaps Washington wanted to be sure that the spouses knew their place!) He was the personnel assistant earning $17,000 a year. What a comedown, both in terms of salary and responsibility. I believe this was the death knell of our marriage. However, I was and still am, glad that I never seriously considered abandoning my career.

Q: You went to Kenya in '91 or so?

COLESHILL: I went to Kenya in 1983.

Q: How long were you in Kenya?

COLESHILL: Three years.

Q: What were you doing?

COLESHILL: The position was called the regional post management assistant officer. U.S. Information Agency had over a dozen of these positions serving small embassies. We trained local administrative assistants and public affairs officers in budget planning, grants management, and a myriad of administrative protocols. The idea was that after a few years, we would have fulfilled our position requirements and would no longer be needed. Hah!

In practical matters I was the regional executive officer for nine East African countries that had no American executive officer. We're talking Ethiopia, Somalia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Malawi and Tanzania, which I visited quarterly. Then once a year I went to Seychelles and Djibouti. Those two countries had a small public diplomacy budget but no U.S. Information Service Foreign Service officer. Have I left anybody out?

Q: You may have. Also Rwanda.

COLESHILL: No, Rwanda and Bujumbura were Francophone, so they were covered by the position in Libreville. Of course, it was Kenya.

Q: It must have been hard to keep these posts both filled and the people in them satisfied, wasn't it?

COLESHILL: Actually not. Many of the people in U.S. Information Agency who went Africa wanted to be in Africa. They were very happy. The public affairs officer from Malawi went on to be the public affairs officer to Uganda. He returned to Washington to be the desk officer East Africa before becoming the public affairs officer to South Africa. There were lots of happy "African hands".

Kenya was stable at the time. It was economically viable, whereas many of "my" posts were not. The public affairs officer in Somalia said, "Ronnie! I'm ordering a wind screen," either for his personal car or the official car. "Could you bring it up next time you come?" I was happy to do that.

I took tea, coffee, strawberries, asparagus, fresh baby carrots, whatever was in season to my colleagues. I was happy to do it because these people became more than my colleagues. Most of them put me up in their homes. The only place that I consistently stayed in a hotel was Malawi, Madagascar, and Mauritius. Everywhere else I stayed with American officers. We were friends. That was the way of the Foreign Service at the time.

Q: Did Africa posts cause problems that you had to deal with, any particular problems?

COLESHILL: Funding was very limited, or under-funded as many public affairs officer thought. The common theme was that the foreign national administrative assistant would hide the money. What I mean by that, he would obligate all the fixed costs, salaries, rents, utilities, those sort of things. The remaining money was program money. However, often, the admin assistant would fear that the public affairs officer would spend it and the post would go into anti-deficiency. What they saw was extra money, and they would hide it most often under salaries. When public affairs officer looked at the budget he was told there was no program money. And the public affairs officer saw that the money obligated tallied with the budget allocation. When it was time to pay for a program, the money was miraculously there. The real problem came in August when the admin assistant removed the "extra" funds from where it wasn't needed. Then the admin assistant would say, "Oh, Mr. public affairs officer, we've got $18,000. What do you want to do with it?" Now he had to do something with it from August until the end of September, or risk losing it not just in the current year but also in subsequent years.

Q: Ouch!

COLESHILL: Yeah! Invariably, it was a mindset that was tough to conquer. The first thing I did when I arrived at post was to reconcile the petty cash. It usually tallied. Then I asked to see the Paris reports. The regional finance office in Paris processed everything but cash payments for African posts plus processed the financial paperwork. I immediately looked at what post had set aside and actually spent on salaries both in the current quarter and the one passed. Salaries would be flush with money, much more than the post ever needed. When asked why, "Well, in case we get a cost of living increase or salary increase." But Washington will provide for general increases. "The funds will be spent on something else." I said, "No! You're padding the salary account with the post's program money. Let the public affairs officer know at the beginning of the year how much funding is available for programs."

Q: Yes, you were almost hoping…looking at the back pages of the book to see where this extra money was being tucked away.

COLESHILL: Yeah, tucked away. Fortunately no one at my posts was stealing money. The very first time I went to post, I ask, "What percentage of your budget is program money?" He said, "I don't have any." I said, "How can you tell me you don't have any program money? How are you doing your programming?" "Oh well, gee, you know…" To be honest, he didn't really know. After I showed him how I reviewed Paris reports and found his program money, he was amazed to learn that 10% of his budget might for programs. Admittedly that's not much, 12% was the goal of the bureau. One post only had 8%. I said, "Okay, if you want more program money, where can you save money? Let's see what you're buying. You have all rooms full of materials from the regional printing office in Manila. Why are you buying so much?" "Well, the funds we used for purchasing Manila items are in a separate account that is not actually cash." It's like a debit card that can be used only with one vendor and is funded by someone else annually. I said, "Well, you don't have to spend it. You can say, 'I only want that account to have $5,000 and put the balance in my regular budget.'" "Ah! Will they do that?" "Sure, they'll do that. And if you additional supplies from Manila later, you just move money from your regular budget back into the Manila account." I was the golden girl. I became important to them!

Q: The disease. The AIDS. Had that hit while you were there?

COLESHILL: Not yet. It was problem by the time I arrived in Zaire. Not so much yet when I was in Kenya. It wasn't yet clear how this was going to decimate the continent .

Q: What sort of backing did you get from the African bureau of the U.S. Information Agency? Was it a responsive bureau?

COLESHILL: It was very supportive. While I was in Kenya, the area director for Africa was John Clingerman, the former Ambassador to Lesotho. The executive director was a female senior Foreign Service officer who was a great mentor to me. I eventually became executive director for Africa after I left Zaire, which was my next assignment. I found the

bureau very supportive in part, if think, because the public affairs officers thought I was doing useful stuff for them.

Q: You left Kenya when?

COLESHILL: I left Kenya with my new husband in September of 1986.

All right. Let me make my announcement here. Today is the 16th of February 2012 with Renate Coleshill. You have left Kenya, and where are you off to?

COLESHILL: I was assigned to Kinshasa, Zaire after six months of French language training at the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: You also mentioned that you have a new husband.

COLESHILL: Yes, Walter Frederick Leonard Coleshill, a British Diplomat.

Q: You might want to put in there how you met him and all.

COLESHILL: Before we do that, can we go back to Kenya?

Q: Sure.

COLESHILL: After we hung up I thought about Kenya. I went to Kenya in 1983. Jomo Kenyatta died in 1978. Daniel Arap Moi was vice president. The world was watching to see what was going to happen. Kenyatta was Kikuyu, Kenya's dominant tribe. Moi was a Kalenjin, a minority tribe. They did have a peaceful transition, and by the time I got there Moi was proving himself to be an adept politician. Unfortunately he was already beginning to show himself corrupt. Of course Kenyatta was also corrupt, the principal difference was Kenyatta kept the money in the country and Moi hid the money in Switzerland.
It was an interesting time for me to be there and to see what had been a peaceful transition fading.

Q: Did you find in your dealings at all with Kenyans that things didn't work well unless there was a payoff?

COLESHILL: Not really, but occasionally. When Walter and I decided to get married he went to the Registrar General's Office to find out what paperwork was needed for us, as foreigners, to legally marry. We needed to present documents showing we could legally marry and sign the registry book in order to get our marriage certificate. Walter said the General Registry Office was offensive with the toilets backed up. He said the Nairobi Registry Office was no place to begin our married lives!.

Walter asked the registrar to come early to our wedding on Saturday so, we and our witness could sign the book. The registrar said, "Oh, Mr. Coleshill, you know I go to my

farm on the weekend." Walter knew immediately that he was being hit up for a little under the table cash. Walter said, "Well, if you have to go to your farm, I fully understand that you have work to do there. Please come to our house early on Friday? It is, after all, a regular working day." Well, he had really no choice. So we had a little champagne ceremony on Friday with the signing of the book and a religious ceremony and reception on Saturday. My husband never pays a bribe.

Q: How were Americans treated at the time? Was there a distancing between us and them?

COLESHILL: It depended on who the "them" are. There was a vast economic difference between American embassy personnel the average Kenyan. Certainly we had Kenyan friends, who were attached to the government or university. My husband was the British consul general, so he had lots of Kenyan contacts. When you talk about Kenyans, there's such a diversity and not just among tribes. There was huge Asian population, and they're every bit as Kenyan as black Kenyans. The same was true of the big white settler population. We had friends and contacts, clear across the spectrum.

Q: Was there still ___. I don't know where stood the situation in Uganda at the time vis-a-vis Idi Amin.

COLESHILL: That was long passed. Idi Amin was in the early 1970s to the late 1970s He was in exile in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Actually he lived not far from where I lived in Jeddah. We shopped at the same grocery store. Things were not really settled in Uganda yet. Milton Obote was president. Museveni's Popular Resistance Army was fighting a guerilla war and eventually toppled him in 1985, maybe 1986. We drove to Uganda twice.

A lot of the Asians Idi Amin threw out of Uganda ended up in Kenya. They pretty well melded into the Asian-Kenyan community, but as I recall there was talk that the government would not grant them any type of citizenship. There was no public backlash against the white settlers either, although I'm sure that in the black Kenyan community there was rumblings about that.

The biggest problem in Kenya was tribal. English is the official language, but there are three main language groups, which is the main criteria for a tribe. Kikuyu is the majority tribe; they're against Maasai, who are against the Meru, who are against Somali, who are again the Luo, and so on with some 30 different tribes,

Q: This is probably an indiscreet question, but in the street as a woman, were they pinching or fondling or patting you? Was this a problem?

COLESHILL: No, Not at all! You were jostled only on the street because of crowds.

Q: That's normal.

COLESHILL: I never worried I would be molested in any way. I had more of that problem in Italy!

Q: I was going to say, I was consular general in Naples at one time and with a pretty daughter! How did you meet your husband?

COLESHILL: My first husband and I separated in Kenya. We were bridge players so now I needed a new bridge partner. I was paired off with this French lady, and this woman had more conventions... Do you play bridge?

Q: A little. Very little, but a little.

COLESHILL: She had more conventions than I have ever in my life heard. It wasn't just conventions for bidding which I was able to follow along with her, but she cue carded. Her first discard I was not to pay any attention to. Her second discard, if it was a red card, meant she wanted a black. If it was seven or higher, it meant that it was to be a spade, or a six or lower it was to be a club.

Q: [laughter] Oh, God!

COLESHILL: I might have eventually caught on to what she was signaling me, but I was not having fun. After each hand she critiqued every card I played. I told woman who organized the bridge group that with my busy travel schedule, I couldn't schedule bridge twice a month. It wasn't fair to my partner. "I think I need to quit bridge group." The woman who organized it said, "Is this because of Nicole?" [laughter] I thought my God, I had rehearsed my excuse so carefully not to blame anyone! Well, I admitted it was. She said, "There's an English guy. You may remember him. He played with his daughter a couple times ago and he, like you, travels all over Kenya, and he needs a partner. Maybe you and he would be good partners if you can get your schedules worked out. Why don't you play with him? You can always quit if this doesn't work out. At this point in your life you should not be retreating for nothing but work." I said, "Yes, Mother." I started to play with Walter, and the rest is history.

Q: What was his job? What was he doing?

COLESHILL: He was the British consul general.

Q: He must have been quite busy at best.

COLESHILL: He was.

Q: At the time you were there, how would you describe the British presence?

COLESHILL: How would I describe the British presence? Walter said that there were approximately 29,000 British subjects living in Kenya. They held British passports but did not necessarily have the right of abode in the United Kingdom. Almost every Kenya

Ministry or Department ministry had at least one British senior administrator who was paid by the British Government.. Certainly this was true of the judicial, police, customs prisons and immigration department. Their presence was ostensibly to provide training and management assistance but in reality they were often the men who ran their departments.

If the senior position in a ministry or office was British, the deputy or number two position would be a Kenyan. And vice versa.

Q: I have to ask, was there any residue left of Happy Valley and all that?

COLESHILL: Even in my time there was still the saying, "Are you married or do you live in Kenya?" By the time we were there most British subjects had their families with them. There were a few Colonial settlers still in existence and even a few white Kenya policemen who had been based in the Happy Valley locations.

Q: Oh, you can have some of that, but Happy Valley… It lingers, the stories of that linger on.

COLESHILL: Yes, they do!

Q: You're going to take French. How long did you take French?

COLESHILL: When husband retired from the British Diplomatic Service, we moved to Washington and studied French for six months at the Rosslyn Foreign Service Institute.

Q: Then off to Zaire?

COLESHILL: Then off to Kinshasa, Zaire.

Q: You were in Zaire from when to when?

COLESHILL: I was in Zaire from 1987 to 1989.

Q: What was your job?

COLESHILL: I was the Executive officer for U.S. Information Service.

Q: First, could you describe the situation in Zaire when you got there in 1987?

COLESHILL: The standard story is that there were only 81 families that mattered in all of Zaire. Twenty were ministers, 20 were ambassadors, 20 had been relegated to their villages, and 20 were in prison. Then there was President Mobutu Sese Seko. Every six months Mobutu would have them change seats, so the ambassadors would go to jail and the ministers would become ambassadors and the people in jail would become something else. That was the standing joke, but it was pretty reflective.

It was probably one of the hardest postings we had because there was no middle class. Our local employees were paid reasonably well, but they were not middle class, even by Zaire standards. Everybody had to find a way to earn an extra penny. Everything had value. We would break used light bulbs and empty liquor bottles. We would have to break them up so that they wouldn't get sold, for someone to put colored water into them and sell them as bootleg liquor somewhere else. Our servant would be given a new one for our lamp., He would give the burnt out bulb to his brother or cousin who would ask his employer to replace it, and so on. Our servant traveled over an hour and a half to come to our house every day. On the bus he would be robbed. The robbers knew when payday was, and he would be robbed of his pay on the bus. Life was for the Zai-awa.

Q: Was there any sense of law? Who was doing the robbing? Were they soldiers or what?

COLESHILL: The rule of law did not exist. Everybody, including the police and military, robbed at will. The American Embassy employed a company of the Zairian Army. They received their salary, were fed, clothed and armed by the Embassy. If an employee suffered a traffic accident in Kinshasa, we were told not to stop but drive to the embassy compound and get behind the Embassy gates as quickly as possible. Our military took care of whatever might have happened, even if someone was killed in an accident.

Q: Did you feel safe? I assume you lived in an apartment or house or what?

COLESHILL: As the rule of law did not exist we did not feel safe. I lived in a house with a walled garden. We had permanent day and night guards who were equipped with radios that were connected to the Embassy Control Center. I had two big dogs. I did not have these two dogs because they were guard dogs but they happened to be large enough to qualify, and they slept in the bedroom with us. My husband wasn't going to leave them outside to let somebody throw poisoned meat over the wall. I first had the dogs in Saudi Arabia.

Did I feel safe? Certainly not as safe there as I did anywhere else up to that point, but I did not spend time worrying about it. I believed our guards would do their job. They presented a pretty high profile. We had Zairian neighbors who didn't have guards. It was easier to rob them. Mind you, they didn't have as much as we did obviously.

What worried us more than anything was the drive to and from the embassy. Have you served in Africa?

Q: No, I haven't.

COLESHILL: There were these mammy wagons—they were little shuttle buses. Three-quarters of the people on the bus were hanging on the sides or riding on the top because the buses took five times more people than they were designed to carry. We worried that someone holding on to the outside of this truck or bus would see diplomatic plates on our vehicle and think, "All I need to do is fall off and have this guy hit me and then my

family will be taken care of forever." A fatal accident meant a lifetime of wealth for the family. A lifetime of wealth would probably not have broken us, but I really didn't want to kill anyone. It was a very difficult post in which to serve..

Q: What sort of work was USIA doing there?

COLESHILL: We had a very nice large library downtown. We operated a direct English teaching program. We brought in speakers, cultural groups; had an exchange program.. Exchange programs were difficult even though we were going to pay for their transportation and give them a stipend and lodging. One guy said he couldn't come because he didn't have a suitcase Another didn't have a coat, and he was going to Washington in April. He didn't own a coat. He had nothing to put into a suitcase. And he was a university professor. We decided to do an analysis of our library usage. We discovered three-quarters of our materials were never checked out. Yet the library was full of patrons every day.

Q: Did you feel the U.S. Information Service program in Zaire was mainly just to keep Zaire in the American camp? It sounds like it wasn't a very successful program.

COLESHILL: How do we measure success? Do we measure success because President Mobutu's Ambassador sometimes voted with us in the UN? Do we measure success because we had programs of anti-corruption or total quality management attended by university professors? Do we measure success because people came to the library? Or do we measure success because people actually used the library materials? How does one measure attitudinal changes? That was something U.S. Information Agency grappled with for a long time and, thirty years later, State Department is still grappling with.

How does the political section measure their success? Because they were able to report that there was going to be a coup three weeks before it happened, or do they measure success in some other way? I think when you can quantify something, for example, in the consular section you say, "I got 80 people out of jail this quarter, issued 50 visas, and helped ten distressed Americans." Those are quantifiable measures of success.

I'm not smart enough to tell you how the government—how State Department—ought to measure success. Certainly in days of yore when U.S. Agency for International Development built X number of miles of roads to open up forest areas, they measured that as success. But now we say, "Wow. What a shame they built this road into the rain forest, and now there is all this illegal logging going on, and the logs are going down that U.S. Agency for International Development-built road." I'm not qualified to say

Q: I don't know if anybody's qualified. It depends on your definition.

COLESHILL: We considered our English teaching program a success because it was self-sustaining. The students' tuition paid for the teachers, the American contract director, and all the supplies. One could say that was a measure of success. But the student body was self-selecting and consisted, in part, of ladies of the night, mechanics and air

conditioning guys. We offered mid-ranking Zairians scholarships who came one time then said, "No, thank you." Suddenly our success doesn't seem so successful, does it?

Q: I think this is true of so many people who have gone through these countries. It's not traditional diplomacy as keeping a quasi-client state. Of course it's a little hard to say who's the client of whom.

COLESHILL: The British Council in Kinshasa had a very active English teaching program. It's a given that when you learn a foreign language, you learn that country's culture. That's a good thing.

Q: While you were there, was there a perception that the Central Intelligence Agency was sort of calling the shots?

COLESHILL: Definitely. That was the only reason that the embassy was so large. If you look at a map of Zaire, it shows the country touches nine other African countries. Many were in some sort of civil strife and most had access to minerals.

Q: Was the Angola conflict going on?

COLESHILL: You bet.

Q: Were there any intrusions in Zairian territory?

COLESHILL: By the Israelis, yes.

Q: What were they up to?

COLESHILL: I don't know. That information was way beyond my pay grade.

Q: Did the Angolan War affect you at all?

COLESHILL: No. Not personally at all, no. That was a long way off.

Q: Everything was a long way off, wasn't it? In the country itself.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: There's no real driving around.

COLESHILL: Not much. You could fly to Lubumbashi. From there you could drive into Zambia. Travel by road was not safe. We flew to Goma, on Lake Kivu. From there we drove to Virunga National Park to see the mountain gorillas. It was a wonderful trip; very expensive but worthwhile. When it was time to fly to Kinshasa, there was no aircraft. President Mobutu had commandeered the large civilian jet we should have been on. We

were stranded in Goma for three extra days. With the danger and the uncertainty, it was probably the longest two years of my life.

Q: Work wise, how did you find it?

COLESHILL: Again, I liked my work and the people I worked with. I liked what I did, and I think I did it reasonably well. The public affairs officer did not have a deputy so I became the de facto deputy. As such I got much more involved not only in the decision-making of our programs, but also in the implementation. Liking my job didn't keep me from wondering what we were doing there. What were we trying to accomplish? Not just "we" in the U.S. Information Service, but "we" in the embassy. What was the economic section accomplishing? Is maintaining such a large embassy good use of U.S. taxpayers' dollars? Mind you, even as a retiree I've asked that same question about the embassies in Iraq and Libya.

Q: I can imagine it would be. Was Charlie Wick there?

COLESHILL: Oh, yes.

Q: You want to talk about Charlie Wick and your impressions.

COLESHILL: [laughter] Well, you know he was certainly a double-edged sword. He had some strange ideas, and shared Ronald Reagan's views of the world. On the plus side, he had Ronald Reagan's ear so he was able to not only keep our budget stable but enhance it.

In 1982, for example, during martial law in Poland, he produced, or had produced, a film called Let Poland Be Poland. Charlton Heston introduced the film on the international day of solidarity with Poland. Another one of his pet projects was to install a TVRO in every African village. Do you know what a TVRO is?

Q: No, I don't.

COLESHILL: It's television receive-only and refers to the reception of satellite television unconnected to a commercial provider. Of course it never went into any African village, but we installed the satellites at embassies and consulates around the world for programming. The program was called "Worldnet" which (in theory) allowed us to tap the movers and the shakers of America, not just inside the Beltway or the University of California, but across America, to talk with our audiences around the world. It was meant to augment, and perhaps ultimately replace, the speaker program. The speaker could be anywhere in the U.S. with the satellite capability. His or her presentation would be seen on a television screen at any number of embassies. The camera was static. After the presentation, the audience was given the opportunity to ask questions. The conversation was in real time but only the speaker was on the air. It was talking heads. I think Mr. Wick is credited for having launched the first live global satellite television network. It was very new technology that intrigued our audiences, particularly in Africa.

I was tasked to hire a local engineering firm to build satellite base stations in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi. I was sent the specifications. Among many other things, the base station had to face true north. I'm in Zaire! Do you know how many engineering companies there are in Zaire? I finally found an engineer who spoke poor English and indifferent French, but not enough of either that I could carry on a conversation with. With the help of a translator who spoke English, French, Swahili and Lingala, we should have been able to get this right.

They built the base station, and a technician from Guatemala came to look at it and said, "You know, Ronnie, this isn't true north. It isn't geodetic north." I said, "You're kidding me? It is north." "No, it has to be true north. He had to take it down, and he had to rebuild it. It's the same thing down in Lubumbashi because it isn't true north either.

After we rebuilt the base station, he came back and said it was still were not true north. Finally I said, "I cannot find anyone in Zaire who's going to build a concrete pad with these specifications facing true north. You're going to have to send someone from somewhere else to come and do this. Finally, a South African company built them and got them facing true north.

Q: What did you do when you don't find a true north?

COLESHILL: It couldn't be used for the satellite, so broke it apart and started over. All this time I wondered, "What are we going to do with the satellite dish?" I didn't understand what the technology was and how we were going to use it. Finally we got the satellite dish up, and they called me, "Come on down. It's up and it's running." The satellite was in the garden with a television attached to covered by a tent so we could see it. We were actually seeing and talking live with people in Washington. Suddenly I understood the program value. This was before email and internet, so tit was really a new wave of technology in its infancy.

So we organized our first Worldnet program. Our auditorium was chocker block full. That's a good thing, right? And here we go back to this discussion success. Was it a success there was standing room only? Probably not because most of those people were there to see the technology. They didn't care about the message, but that doesn't mean that it couldn't have been successful technology and used for the correct purpose in some other country. Zaire just wasn't it.

Q: Did you get around to any of the other countries there? Rwanda? Burundi?

COLESHILL: Not to Rwanda or Burundi, but to Zambia and South Africa.

Q: Brazzaville?

COLESHILL: Yes, we took the ferry to Brazzaville a number of times.

Q: What was going on there?

COLESHILL: They were holding some big peace talks at the time. The Brazzaville Protocol between South Africa, Cuba and Angola. It paved the way for Namibia's independence.

Brazzaville was interesting in that it was closer to West African mentality due to its Francophone influence, whereas Zaire had been Belgian colony. At independence, there was not a single university-educated Zairian. The Belgians did virtually nothing to prepare the colony for independence. They ruled the country with an iron fist and didn't care about their population at all whereas the Brits and the French made sure that people got educated, that they got better health services.

Q: Did you feel that in Zaire itself the ministries were efficient or was it pretty much a one person show with Mobutu?

COLESHILL: It was very much a one-person show with Mobutu. What worried us most was what would happen when Mobutu fell. It was not a question of "if," it was "when." We expected violent anti-American backlash. Mobutu organized the coup d'état that deposed Patrice Lumumba who was eventually executed by a military firing squad. Was the Central Intelligence Agency complicit? Many Zairians certainly thought so. The U.S. supported Mobutu despite his authoritarian rule and corruption because of his anti-communist stance. He was viewed as our dictator. When he was finally overthrown in the latter 1990s, I was really surprised that there wasn't much anti-American backlash. But by then the country was bankrupt, in the throes of regional secession and border strife. It was the tour I liked the least.

Going back to the ministries, they were very efficient at taking bribes.

Q: What about support from Washington? Sometimes you have personnel problems or you need this. There's such a thing as the kind and loving aunt, and there's also the one rather arbitrary. It's the feeling.

COLESHILL: The feeling. First of all, U.S. Information Agency was a much smaller organization than State. We knew practically everyone within the service. The African hands worked their way through the ranks serving in Africa. The Africa bureau was very supportive if we had personnel issues, they helped us deal with them. If you wanted to stay in Africa, they helped with the assignments process. Likewise, if you wanted to leave. When I expressed interest in the executive officer position in Zaire, despite my not being at grade, the Area director virtually promised me the assignment. Then when he learned that another Africa executive officer who was at grade also bid on the position, he had a problem — a promise to me that the agency probably wouldn't let him keep.

He found a solution. He offered me the East African desk officer position, which also would be very career enhancing. Later when it turned out the guy who wanted Zaire took

an assignment to Caracas, the bureau came back to me with the choice of either executive officer Kinshasa or desk officer in Washington.

Despite not finding Zaire a particularly good assignment, I was promoted into the position. It did for me professionally exactly what I wanted it to do. I made a name for myself as being a seasoned executive officer, being a team player, working at very hardship post.. After Zaire I was assigned to the executive officer position in the African bureau.

Q: That's quite an accomplishment. For anybody reading this, being executive officer for one of the geographic bureaus is a major, major job. You came back when?

COLESHILL: I came back to Washington in 1989.

Q: By the way, who was the ambassador when you were in Zaire?

COLESHILL: Brandon Grove when we first arrived; William Harrop followed him.

Q: How did Bill work with you?

COLESHILL: He worked with me just fine! How did I work with him? You'd have to ask Bill that.

Q: I interviewed him a long time ago. Some ambassadors are, you might say, simpatico *with the interest of U.S. Information Agency and others are almost indifferent.*

COLESHILL: Bill was not an indifferent person to any of us. He knew how to get the most, I believe, out of all of his sections, probably the Central Intelligence Agency as well. I liked Bill, and I still do. We work together on the American Diplomacy Publishers Board.

Q: He's on a board staff of our association.

COLESHILL: We are not going to bad mouth Bill, no!

Q: Okay. No, I wasn't after that, but I'm trying to… Different ambassadors have different styles.

COLESHILL: There was a difference between the way most career ambassadors operated versus political-appointee ambassadors. The political appointees were much more hands-off with regard to running the embassy. They focused more on the bilateral relationship. Most career ambassadors, at least in my experience, took the time to make sure that their mid-level people were being mentored and used to their fullest. Bill was in that category.

Q: You came back to Washington in what was it, '89 was it?

COLESHILL: Yes, the summer of 1989.

Q: How long were you in the job as executive director of African affairs?

COLESHILL: Two years.

Q: Was Charlie Wicks still in charge?

COLESHILL: If he served into 1989, it wasn't for very long. It was Bruce Gelb most of the time.

Q: How did you find the job?

COLESHILL: Are you asking how I liked the job or how did I get the job?

Q: How did you get the job?

COLESHILL: I got the job because I was a good officer. No. I got the job because the Africa area director, Ambassador John Clingerman, thought I was good. By the time I got to Washington Bob Gosende was the area director. We had briefly worked before and happy to have me. I loved the job.

Q: What was there to love about it?

COLESHILL: I had a corner office with a window. More importantly, I had a fairly large staff. Up to that point I had never had an American deputy nor supervised American Foreign Service staff. I had a GS-13 civil service deputy and a secretary. I supervised two Foreign Service regional secretary secretaries, a mail and file clerk, a three-person budget office, and the computer operation. We were replacing the Wang computer and workstations with personal desktop computers. One of my work requirements was to install personal computers not just in the bureau but in every African post. Following that, get e-mail connectivity with every post and ensure that both the American and local staff received training. I supervised that operation. It was a big task.

Q: Yeah!

COLESHILL: I enjoyed that. I had a good relationship with the front office. They trusted me, and I knew I could count on them for support. We lived on Capitol Hill, and so I had either a 15-minute walk or a 10-minute subway ride. It was one of those times that everything worked perfectly!

Q: I would think, at the time, the Soviet Union was beginning to fall apart, right?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: The demands on the U.S. Information Agency and the State Department for filling the gap of all the different places. They were opening up or things were changing would have meant that the interest in Africa would have been fading.

COLESHILL: We still had our flagship posts. South Africa because of apartheid and Nelson Mandela. He had been released from prison, but was still under house arrest. Kenya was still important because our Navy used Mombasa as an R&R port. Nigeria's oil was important to us. These countries were important to the U.S. government.

Certainly the agency needed to reprogram resources to open embassies in the newly-independent former Soviet states. I proposed a regionalization concept. Establish a regional public affairs office with a regional public affairs officer, a regional cultural affairs officer and a regional information officer who would cover two to four posts. The consolidated posts would retain a local staff to manage the program. Rwanda-Bujumbura-Uganda could be managed from a regional office in Kenya, for example. Swaziland-Lesotho-Botswana from South Africa. Ghana-Togo-Benin from Cote d'Ivoire. There were other combinations on my proposal. I believed it would work better than previous regionalization efforts if the regional office were not co-located in a country to which it provided services. The area director did not even consider the proposal. There was no way he was going to be the first area director to offer up positions or regionalize his entire operation. Basically he said if I ever breathed a word of this in anyone's hearing that he would personally see that I was out of that job and that I never had another overseas assignment in the U.S. Information Service. Not that it was a dumb idea but I was spitting on the flag and the Virgin Mary all at one time.

Q: Had anybody else been suggesting that idea?

COLESHILL: Not publicly! Good thing I made the presentation to him privately. He was not a happy man that I had thought it through enough to actually make a verbal presentation complete with budget figures, countries to be consolidated, countries where to place the regional offices and how much staff could be reprogrammed, within Africa and give up for the greater good of the agency. He almost fainted away! In the end, he was probably right because no other bureau willingly gave up resources. Word came from on high that the resources would come predominantly from western Europe.

Q: Looking at it, what were the main instruments that U.S. Information Agency was using in the various countries? Was it English teaching, or was it cultural centers? Was it working with the media? Did this vary? How did you view the various things you were using in Africa?

COLESHILL: We did it all. Some of the African posts had direct English teaching program, but most only had English language programs. The difference between a direct English teaching program and an English language program is who we were working with. Direct teaching programs meant just that. We operated language classes for students of English. English language program meant we worked with English as a second language teachers and administrators at universities and local language centers. There

was a cadre of regional English language officers who qualified teachers of English as a second language to assist posts with both programs.

Q: Looking at it practically, does it make a hell of a lot of difference except for an accent, a minor spelling?

COLESHILL: It makes a big difference. It has little to do with the language, but more with the cultural components of the material. Think about what you're learning about England's culture and history when you watch Downton Abbey or East Enders. It's the same with learning a language. Learning English with American history or cultural materials introduces the student to our way of thinking, our history, our culture. The U.S. Information Agency in Washington produced lots of Americana materials. There were books on Sandberg and Frost and other American poets, American classics authors, materials on American holidays, travel across America, American history, economics. You name it. The materials were produced for teaching English.

Visit USA and American Holidays were written in a very nice, five-word sentences and lovely pictures of American turkey dinners at Thanksgiving, fireworks for July 4th, things like that. What the student is learning is subject-verb agreement, and when to use she versus her. They're learning all of that, but learning it in context American culture. These are not neutral sentences. I realized this when I studied French, Portuguese and German. My French was very African French and my Portuguese was Brazilian. And German? There are huge differences between German-German, Austrian-German and Swiss-German.

Every post had a media program. The Information Officer was the press spokesman of the embassy, usually wrote the Ambassador's speeches, worked with the local and visiting American press.

Every post had an exchange program which included a range of exchange programs: Fulbright professors or scholars, the Eisenhower and/or Humphrey scholars, and the international visitors program which sent visitors to the U.S. for three or four weeks to confer with professional counterparts and to experience firsthand the United States and its institutions. The visitors could be either established or a promising figures in government, politics, the media, education, labor, science and the arts.

The cultural program was also universal. Perhaps not all African countries could program someone like George Balanchine and the New York City ballet, but one- to four-person music groups could easily travel throughout Africa. Art exhibits, films, discussions by American authors or poets were also regular features at our African posts.

The speaker and Worldnet programs were the backbone of most embassy public diplomacy programs. Those programs brought U.S. intelligentsia and expertise directly to their counterparts

Q: Do you want to talk about South Africa? This was a time of great interest or rejoicing with the peaceful transition to black rule under Nelson Mandela. Were we making extraordinary efforts U.S. Information Agency-wise in South Africa at the time?

COLESHILL: We had always made an extraordinary effort to reach the black population in South Africa. We had cultural centers in Soweto and other black townships. I'm not sure that anyone thought that Nelson Mandela would be freed and become the first black president of South Africa. But that there would be a black president was certainly predicted.

Desmond Tutu talked about how in his very early years he went to the American library in South Africa at a time when everything in the country was segregated except the U.S. Information Service library. Now I do believe that is a real measure of success.

Q: Were we pouring more people into South Africa by time you got to be executive director?

COLESHILL: No, we were already fully staffed. We had already had office in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, and Cape Town. The idea that we would find more resources for South Africa or any other African post was an anathema. I tried to make sure none of our African posts suffer any budget cuts. Years after my departure, we did open an office in Soweto.

Q: What about the almost constant turmoil in Somalia and Liberia? We seem to be evacuating posts all the time there. Did you find that some of these places in real turmoil? What the hell's the use of having a program?

COLESHILL: A very valid point, in my opinion. I covered Somalia when I was the regional post management officer in Kenya. At the time we were in the process of building a big new embassy compound on acres of land just outside Mogadishu. I wondered why we needed anything so large But I understood the U.S. military's interest in having access to airfields and ports in Mogadishu and Berbera. Remember, there were years we were in bed with the Somalis and against the Ethiopians; and then we did a flip-flop; friends with the Ethiopians and not with the Somalis. I'm sure some of this has to do with trying to counter Soviet and/or Chinese influence in the region. Some is probably the skewed foreign policy of, "I am a friend of my friend, and I am an enemy of my friend's enemy." That's a real ball and chain around to our foreign policy.

Q: I think it's just plain hard to explain to ourselves. We get sort of trapped into local prejudices.

COLESHILL: Yes. Africa was a challenge. I did my two years as exec and enjoyed my job. I grew professionally with a lot of new responsibilities.

There was one stupid thing that happened. State Department announced a change to pouch mail. They built this six million dollar facility at Dulles Airport, and all of a

sudden the U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Information Service officers overseas were not going to be able to get their mail through this facility. This change was to take effect just before Christmas.

That meant the U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Information Agency had to find a way to provide mail service to all posts worldwide that did not have access to the military APO/FPO system. There were only three posts in Africa that did not depend on the pouch service.

Q: Why did this come about?

COLESHILL: Who knows? Some bozo decided that State was not responsible for providing pouch services to U.S. Information Service and U.S. Agency for International Development.

Anyway, I consulted my counterparts from Africa with U.S. Agency for International Development Agency to see if we could piggy-back on whatever they came up with. He said, "You don't need to worry about this. Sit back. Nothing will happen. Trust me." He said, "The USAID director is going to go to congress and complain about this."

Sure enough, I reported my conversation to the Africa area director and suggested that the agency director likewise complain to congress. My boss thought that was a good idea.

Q: Who was the boss at that time?

COLESHILL: My boss was Bob Gosende and Bruce Gelb was the U.S. Information Agency director. The upshot was that congress didn't allow the change. They believed their six million dollar appropriation for mail services was for the entire Foreign Service.

Q: Oh, God.

COLESHILL: When we were talking earlier about Africa, Nouakchott was in the Africa bureau.

Q: Mauritania, yeah.

COLESHILL: Mauritania was in the Africa bureau in the U.S. Information Service. In State Department it was in the Middle East and North African bureau. Early in my tenure as executive officer I suggested we close the post. That suggestion fell on deaf ears, but subsequently we gave Mauritania to the Middle East bureau to parallel State's country line-up. We transferred all the resources and even before the end of the fiscal year they closed the post. The Middle East bureau saw there was no value in having a U.S. Information Service presence and reprogrammed the resources that had been the Africa bureau's.

Q: You did this for two years?

COLESHILL: Yes, it was actually supposed to be a three-year tour, but when the executive officer position in Brazil opened as an immediate assignment, I felt I had to at least try for it. It was the first time I ever asked for a curtailment. After my regionalization proposal, the area director and I did not have such a comfortable working relationship so I figured he might be glad to see the back of me.

We had three senior executive officer positions in U.S. Information Agency—Japan, India and Brazil. They were very tough jobs to get and I wasn't at grade. I went to my boss asked about a curtailment to bid on this job. He said, "Not only should you bid on it but I will talk to my counterpart in Latin America and see if we can get you that job. That is the right job for you," and that is what ended up happening.

Q: We'll pick this up. What are we talking about, 1991?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: Okay, we'll pick this up in 1991 when you're off to Brazil, I assume after some Portuguese training.

COLESHILL: I did. I had private Portuguese classes.

Q: Okay. Today is the 23rd of February 2012 with Ronnie Coleshill. You're getting trained in Portuguese.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: When was that? When did you start that?

COLESHILL: January 1991.

Q: I can't remember. Had you had any Spanish before?

COLESHILL: No.

Q: You didn't have that course that trained Spanish speakers into speaking Portuguese.

COLESHILL: No. I went Diplomatic Learning Institute for private lessons.

Q: What was your job?

COLESHILL: I was going to go out to be the executive officer of U.S. Information Service in Brasilia.

Q: You got there when?

COLESHILL: I got there the end of May 1991.

Q: What was the situation in Brazil when you got there in '91?

COLESHILL: The biggest issue in Brazil at that time was hyper-inflation, over 2,000% a year. Whatever you paid for a cup of coffee in the morning was not the same price as you paid in the afternoon. This was true of everything you bought.

Q: Ouch!

COLESHILL: Yeah! The grocery stores did not put their prices on individual items. In 1991 here in the U.S. grocery stores put a price sticker on each individual item. It wasn't until later that prices would only be put on the shelves. In Brazil the prices were posted on a chalkboard so the grocer could quickly update the prices during shopping hours.

Q: How did the embassy deal with this?

COLESHILL: With great consternation because it was illegal to price things in hard currency. Even though everybody did it. You wanted a television, for example. The television was $500 so you paid $500 worth of local currency at the prevailing exchange rate of that day. It was illegal under Brazilian national law. But that's what how it worked.

Q; I would think that being a manager of this would be your main preoccupation…

COLESHILL: It was.

Q: …how to deal with this.

COLESHILL: The local newspaper announced the new minimum salary for workers. Workers salaries were quoted in how many minimum salaries they received. For example, some received one, others two, two and a half, three, and so on. This did not apply to salaried employees as they obviously always received more than the equivalent of whatever the one minimum salary was. We paid our servant weekly. The morning of payday we checked the paper for that day's minimum salary rate, cashed a check for local currency, then went home, ostensibly for lunch, but in reality to pay her.

During our four years the currency went from *cruzado, cruzeiro, cruzeiro real*, to the *real*. Those were the four different currencies. And often before a new currency was introduced, the government merely lopped off three zeros with an ink stamp, revising the value of the notes. Coins were almost always worthless. .

Q: What was happening particularly to the local staff?

COLESHILL: Oh, they were beside themselves. They would get paid twice a month like any other U.S. government employee. The spent their disposal income buying stuff

whether it was rice or tires or whatever they might need if they had the capability to store it. They knew that next payday those products would cost more. Then, because the local currency lost value against the dollar, we paid fewer dollars, but at the same time they suffered from hyper-inflation. Every week we told Washington how the exchange rate changed and what the new inflation rate was. The calculation of exchange rate gains versus inflation losses in dollar terms was high finance indeed.

Q: Oh, boy.

COLESHILL: It was hard work.

Q: Were you given any sort of training?

COLESHILL: By this time I knew all that. It was hard dealing with 2,400% inflation a year. Argentina and Bolivia probably other countries with hyper-inflation. That's extreme at the very most, but the process of adjusting post's budget for inflation is the same whether it's 3%, 30%, or 3,000%.

Q: How long were you there?

COLESHILL: Four years.

Q: Did hyper-inflation last that whole time?

COLESHILL: Yes, but we were able to implement solution for our local employees salaries. We were successful in getting Washington to agree to a dollar-based salary schedule. On payday, the embassy used that day's exchange rate to pay the local employees in cruzeiros, or whatever the currency of the day was. This was after three and a half years of unbelievable hyper-inflation.

In 1992 President Collor de Mello was impeached for corruption. Vice President Franco became the acting president. He was generally viewed as honest, appointed a politically-balanced cabinet, and had broad support from Congress. Then in 1993 he appointed Fernando Henrique Cardoso as minister of finance. The backbone of their efforts to stabilize the economy was the introduction of the *plano real*. A non-monetary currency, *unidade real de valor* (URV) was created whose value was equal of one U.S. dollar. Prices were quoted in URV, but had to be paid in *cruzeiro real*. This, in effect, made the embassy's local salary plan legal. Of course other fiscal and economic measures were implemented to keep inflation under control.

Then at some point a new currency, the *real* or *reais* in its plural form, was printed. After the initial parity with the dollar, the *real* gradually appreciated. Then our employees were disadvantaged having their salary calculated in U.S. dollars. They were receiving fewer *reais*. The lower paid employees agitated to revert to a local currency based salary structure. Most of it was an economic factor, but to some it was a certain amount of pride,

"We've got our economy under control and we don't want to be tied to the dollar because the dollar is not as stable as our own currency."

The higher paid employees were smart enough to know that this was an aberration; that this currency was not going to remain stronger than the dollar. They did not want to change. They said, "We'll tough it out right now. The *real* will not continue to stay stronger than the dollar." We left the end of August 1995, and at that point the exchange rate was 0.80:1, so the fight was going strong. As the personnel officer said, "If we change back after having only done this for less than a year, we will never do this again. You will have lost the opportunity." I believe in the end the embassy allowed a vote. As there were more lower-paid employees, the vote to revert carried.

By this time I was gone, but this is what I heard. The process of reverting wasn't done in one month either and sure enough, after several months the *real* began its downward spiral, although inflation was kept under more moderate control. But by 1998, the *real* was in a free fall. Inflation reared its ugly head again, and the embassy local staff was again disadvantaged.

Q: What type of information posts did we have in Brazil?

COLESHILL: What do you mean by information?

Q: In other words what U.S. Information Agency posts did we have in Brazil?

COLESHILL: When I arrived in 1991, we had posts in Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Porto Alegre, Recife and Belo Horizonte.

Q: I take it by this time Rio hadn't moved to a consular status, had it?

COLESHILL: Yes, it had. However, the Rio and Sao Paulo consulates were the size of the embassy. The ambassador was not very happy about this and spent some considerable amount of his energy trying to downsize the consulates or minimize their importance..

Q: How did you find the U.S. Information Agency staff in the country?

COLESHILL: They were wonderful. First of all, the Brazilians are wonderful people. On the whole they're intelligent, hard working, family oriented, believe in education for their children. They're big sports people. We were in Brazil during the soccer World Cup where the local staff was given the afternoon off every day that the Brazilian team played in the World Cup. Of course, that was one of the years Brazil won the Cup. That was a national holiday!

Our employees were dedicated, professional, honest and they came to work. You didn't have a lot of staff calling in sick on Mondays and Fridays. I said professional, and their work was. But, some of the women came to work looking like they were going to a beach party. Way too casual. And this wasn't just in the embassy.

Q: Were you putting much emphasis on English teaching?

COLESHILL: Yes, we were. This was the first country I served in that had bi-national centers. A bi-national center was partially funded by the U.S. government and otherwise funded through a local entity. We had a big bi-national center in Brasilia, the Casa Thomas Jefferson. An American Foreign Service officer served as the director. Casa Thomas Jefferson had a English teaching program. They would charge for those classes, but because they were bi-national centers, those centers could keep the money and put it back into their program.

There were 300 bi-national centers around the country. They were classified as A's, B's, and C's. A's being those that were relatively large, often aligned with a university and always in a geographical area important to us. B's were not as large, and C's were small mom-and-pop places. We also used them as programming venues, so when we had either speakers or cultural presentations come, we almost always would make sure that some of these smaller bi-national centers would get a speaker or a cultural program annually.

We would help fund bi-national centers by giving them grant money to do such things as buy furniture and equipment, televisions videos and other media equipment, books and library materials, and America materials. What we did not do was provide money for salaries, utilities or rent. Those on-going costs were borne by the center.

Q: Did you have a rotating, I call them language officers or language trainers?

COLESHILL: We did, yes. We had both a regional librarian and a regional English language officer. In both of instances those officers were responsible only for Brazil because the country's so large plus huge network of bi-national countries.

Q: Did you travel much?

COLESHILL: I did, both personally and professionally. As I said we had five branch posts when I arrived. While I was there we closed Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre.

Q: That's quite a reduction of your area, wasn't it?

COLESHILL: It surely was. We had huge budget cuts plus a large reduction-in-force. We were at the point of moving away from the Wang computer and going to personal computers. I won the Luther I. Replogle award for management improvement while I was there because we truly had to rationalize our staff. The fact was that we had the wrong mix of people. It wasn't that these weren't good, dedicated people. For example, in three of our posts we had more drivers than we had cars. In Brasilia I had a man who had worked for us for 20 years. He had been an addressograph plate maker when he started. He was my computer man. I'm not going to suggest that there could not be the type of person who could have embraced computer technology coming from any sort of background, but this man could not. We were using the old mainframe Wang. He

powered up the machine, he did the backup, and if anything went wrong after he called the Wang service rep.

One day I learned much to my chagrin that he did not even know how to restore a backup. We were in the middle of employee evaluation season when suddenly the Wang started making a horrible noise and all the workstations quit. He assured me that he would load the backup and all would be well. It wasn't and by the time he called the Wang service rep, he had damaged three weeks' worth of back ups. By the time we were up and running again, it was five days later and three weeks' worth of data was lost. He was one example of the type of employee where we just had the wrong mix.

I did a full analysis of each post's programs and staffing requirements to fulfill those objectives. And not just the number of employees needed, but what skill sets were needed. Could some functions be regionalized? And we were going through the process of replacing the Wang with personal computers. State Department was still using the Wang, so we needed additional computer expertise at each branch post.

As you know, the government has a reduction-in-force plan that usually means last hired-first fired. This coupled with a point system for years of service, how many "outstanding" evaluations versus merely satisfactory seriously hampered our need to rationalize staff country-wide. Convincing the Latin American bureau to allow us to take a whole new approach was a major undertaking. I succeeded. We terminated 25 people, and I was able to hire 10 new people with different sets of job skills. In the end we were stronger for it even though we had suffered a big cutback in local staffing.

[long pause]

Q: Did you get any feel for the Amazon or that area, or were we just avoiding it?

COLESHILL: I'm sorry?

Q: Did we avoid the Amazon?

COLESHILL: Oh no, of course we didn't. We had Class A bi-national centers in Manaus and Belem, and numerous smaller ones throughout the region. Our bi-national centers had a huge reach. I really don't know what you mean by ignored.

Q: Not ignored, but you're answering my question. We did have bi-national centers there.

COLESHILL: All over the country from border to border, yes.

Q: How about the exchange program there?

COLESHILL: Very active. One of the cultural affairs officers was dedicated to the exchanges program. By that I mean the International Visitors program, the Fulbright,

Humphrey, and other academic exchange programs which sent Brazilians to the U.S. The bi-national centers were integral. Many of the candidates were recommended by the folks at bi-national centers. They really broadened out reach throughout the country.

Again, the bi-national centers provided a broader range of venues for us to program speakers and cultural programs. The smaller bi-national centers in particular were happy to get any American visitor.

Q: How about relations with the universities? Sometimes in some places, these are very leftist and almost you can't go there. How stood things when you were there?

COLESHILL: Remember we're talking Latin America here where hard right wing government and military dictators ruled through the 1970s and probably well into the 1980s. Argentina, Bolivia and Chile come to mind. Pinochet's rule didn't end until 1990. The transition to a civil government in Brazil happened in the mid-1980s, I believe. When Lula da Silva became president in 2003, he was the first leftist administration. Shortly after taking office he realized that he had to be more mainstream or he wasn't going to be able to rule the country. So the universities were not a hot bed of leftist activity.

The other interesting thing about Brazil was that although primary and secondary education was ostensibly free, it was terribly under funded and very, very poor. But university education, which was well funded and first class, was also free to anyone who passed very rigorous entrance exams. A public secondary school education simply did not prepare a student for that Folks with money sent their children to private schools. This included our maid, who worked two jobs and saved every penny so her daughter could go to private school and eventually get into university. That's the ticket for better employment, right?

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: The first time I returned to the States, I ask the maid if there was anything she wanted from the States?" She asked for a pair of jeans for her daughter. Jeans in Brazil cost $180 for a regular old pair of jeans that cost $20 here, so I brought them.

The next time I asked if she wanted anything, do you know what she said to me? "I'd rather have the dollars. Don't buy me anything!" She wanted the dollars because she said, "My daughter is going to private school, and I have to pay for that. I have to save up for it." How can you save anything when you're facing 2,000% inflation?"

For an uneducated woman, she was pretty smart. After that I gave I paid her bonuses in dollars. I couldn't pay her salary in dollars but a bonus was a gift.

Q: Was there sort of an expectation that with this inflation would eventually come an explosion of public unhappiness?

COLESHILL: I don't know. Inflation was obviously fueled by the fact that every day salaries also went up with it. The government ensured that the lowest paid people were going to continue to get salary increases. That was the purpose of these minimum salaries, and they would say, "One minimum salary is worth X amount of *cruzeiro*s," and that was announced weekly. I think the government believed that as long as people's salaries kept pace with inflation, they would survive.

Q: Who was our ambassador there?

COLESHILL: It was Ambassador Rick Melton when we first arrived and then Melvin Levitsky after Rick left.

Q: Did you get support from the ambassadors?

COLESHILL: Good support from Rick Melton; not so much from Mel Levitsky.

Q: Why was that, do you know?

COLESHILL: I don't know. Rick Melton was a caring person, even though he wasn't a real outgoing sort of people-person. He was very reserved, but he cared what was going on the embassy. Many of the local staff might never have seen him except at his Christmas party, but he cared what was happening to them and made sure their problems were being addressed. I really appreciated the fact that he allowed us to discharge our responsibilities without being in our knickers. He wanted to understand what our problems were and what impact our solutions were going to have and what other alternatives we considered. I liked working for Rick, and we're still friends today. As a matter of fact he and his wife were just here last Saturday. I had a lot of respect for him professionally.

Q: Did you find supporting branch posts took a disproportionate amount of time?

COLESHILL: For me, no. I was the executive officer for Brazil, not just Brasilia. I supported the public diplomacy program, not the office. I learned this in Saudi Arabia where I had branch posts in Riyadh and Dhahran.

What took an inordinate amount of time were personnel issues, both American and local employees. We had a big staff.

Q: Was employment with Americans a good thing for Brazilians or not at this time?

COLESHILL: It was. First of all, they got paid like clockwork every two weeks. Perhaps an international company would have paid them regularly too, but what if that company just upped and left? Most of our friends worked Brazilian companies and some didn't get paid regularly. I had a friend who worked for Petrobras. Once he didn't get paid for three months. How do you live when you get an IOU instead of a salary?

Q: Good God.

COLESHILL:. The fact is he lived quite well because he kept most of his money offshore. He was a vice president for Petrobras for God's sake. This was, of course, illegal, but who am to judge?

Q: What about the American personnel? Were they a happy crew there or not?

COLESHILL: I don't know really how to answer that because Brasilia itself is not a fun city to live in like Rio or San Paulo .

Q: it looked awfully sterile from pictures I've seen of it.

COLESHILL: And it is. It is. The city was hard to live in, especially for mid-grade officers and lower because they were assigned to apartments, regardless of family size. Senior folks all had houses, some with swimming pools. This created the haves, and the have-nots. The have-nots were not very happy about that, and I understood that.

That being said, the embassy had six memberships at the golf club. That meant 12 of us could play golf any day of the week. We had tennis courts and a swimming pool on the compound. The school was very good with an International Baccalaureate program and wonderful extra-curricular activities. The commute to the school, and to the embassy, was very short—less than a half an hour for everyone. I think it was probably easier to bring up teenagers in Brasilia than in Rio or Sao Paulo with all the nightclubs, malls, and big city activities where you may not want your teenagers to go to.

Q: Was there much of a problem with the married people with the male staff ending up with mistresses? I remember back in the bad old days in Rio that seemed to be the pattern.

COLESHILL: In the four years that we were there, there was some of that. There was a guy from the Central Intelligence Agency. It seemed that every 6 years he married a 25 year old, and she happened to be with the embassy!

Q: Oh, God!

COLESHILL: People who knew him said she was going to be wife number five. The bigger problem was the officers would come to post and claim separate maintenance allowance for a wife remaining in the U.S. More than a few then took Brazilian mistresses. I found this reprehensible because it was not just cheating on a spouse, but cheating the government.

Q: Was there any guerrilla action or any leftist action in the country when you were there?

COLESHILL: No.

Q: How about criminality?

COLESHILL: Ah, well, yes. Certainly there was that. Again, in Brasilia we didn't have as much of that. In Rio we were pick-pocketed, assaulted actually. Walter was pushed to the ground and a guy put his hand in his pocket. Then when he got Walter's money, he realized there wasn't very much, and he threw the money down and went, "Whuf," and he walked away.

In Salvador I was handing money to a vendor when this little kid comes along tries to steal the money between my hand and the vendor's. And while this was happening someone else took my watch off my wrist. Street crime was pretty rampant especially in Rio and Sao Paulo.

We had roving guards at night and an alarm system which we were told to use. I think we probably did the first few months but didn't bother after that. We had two big dogs! Certainly there were maids that stole money or goods from their employers. But no, it didn't feel the same level of heightened awareness in Brasilia than when we went to any other city in Brazil.

Q: You were there until when?

COLESHILL: 'Until August 1995.

Q: Where did you go after '95?

COLESHILL: India.

Q: Oh, my goodness!

COLESHILL: My dream post.

Q: Why your dream post?

COLESHILL: I went to India in 1972 on vacation. I traveled to India, Afghanistan, and Nepal. We just did northern India, Rajasthan mostly. Even though I had lived in Japan and visited many countries isn't he Far East, India was without a doubt the most exotic place I'd ever seen. I wanted the opportunity to live there.

The executive officer position in India was also a senior position. I was in Brazil in a stretch position. When it was bidding time and India was on the list, I had not yet made senior officer. The position made sense career-wise. When my tour in Brazil was finishing, India was in the correct cycle for me to bid on that job. I said, "I want to bid on India." My husband says, "You go for it."

The executive officer positions in Rome, Paris and Madrid all opened up about the same time. But they were advertised earlier because all had language requirements. India did not so that didn't appear on the list until six months later. So I didn't bid on Rome, Paris or Madrid because I didn't want one of them. My career counselor couldn't understand why I was foregoing three great posts. When I told her I was holding out for India, she asked, "What are you going to do if you don't get India?" I said, "Well, I'll come back to Washington," which is what they always the threat, right? "I'll come back to Washington, and then I'll think about retiring."

Lo and behold, I went to see the area director who South East Asia, who I knew fairly well and had worked with before, and told him of my interest in India. He said, "Well, I'm always happy to see your apply for any of our positions," but he didn't say, "Ronnie, you want India, I will get you India." I understood that his response meant I wasn't going to get this job even before he asked, "Is there any other job that you are interested in my area?" I said, "Well, let me think about that."

I did some sleuthing, and found out the wife of the public affairs officer assigned to Pakistan was slated for the job the India. This was to be their tandem. My husband and I talked about what we going to do. By this time, Rome, Paris and Madrid had been assigned. We decided to keep my name on the list for India, and then bid on some Washington job and then retire in a year or two.

Lo and behold, Mr. Public Affairs Officer arrived in Pakistan with a honey.

Q: Whoa ho!

COLESHILL: His wife decided not to go overseas, but to stay in the U.S. and file for divorce. She took her name off the list for India, and guess who number two was on the list? Ta ta! So off we went to India.

Q: You were in India from when to when?

COLESHILL: 1995 to 1998.

Q: And you were there for three years.

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: How stood relations with the United States and India?

COLESHILL: They were improving, but the U.S. was giving Pakistan a lot more aid dollars than India, which was a thorn in India's side. The U.S. was trying to have good relationships with both countries. India and Pakistan were also trying to normalize their relationship, but that is a painful process still in progress.

India's economic liberalization made it an attractive market for U.S. business. Security cooperation increased. During the first Gulf War, India granted refueling rights to U.S. military aircraft en route from the Pacific to the Middle East. There were even some joint Indian and U.S. naval exercises. India's nuclear tests in 1998 brought military cooperation to a halt, but increased the need for us having a diplomatic relations.

Q: What sort of program when you went out did we have?

COLESHILL: We had the full range of U.S. Information Service programs. We had a big, big mission. We had lots of people in New Delhi. We branch posts at the consulates in Bombay (now Mumbai), Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras (now Chennai) plus an American Studies Research Center in Hyderabad.

Q: How stood the things with the information technology business? There were jokes, but I don't know about if you had trouble with your washing machine you would end up to talk with somebody in Hyderabad or something like that. Had you arrived yet?

COLESHILL: It was coming, perhaps not so much with the washing machines and the like, but it was certainly with any sort of computer equipment.

Q: Was there a lot of talent where you worked?

COLESHILL: We had very talented staff. Working for the American embassy was prestigious, actually working for any western embassy, and had job security. What was booming at the time was Bangalore.

Q: Bangalore?

COLESHILL: Bangalore. Call centers were hiring, but in lower cost of living areas. Even an Indian director of a call center was not going to be well

The booming economy created a burgeoning middle class. Indians who had studied in the U.S., the U.K. and Australia and were living abroad began to return to. India had long suffered brain drain. They returned to start up their own businesses. Hotmail was started by a couple of students at the University of California, and one of them was Indian. Hotmail had just been sold to Microsoft while we were there for millions of dollars. That young man never graduated, brought his millions back to India, and developed something else because there was a standard of living in India at that time could not be replicated in Australia, in England, or in the United States. Employees, housing and servants, and all sorts of things were readily available in India.

First question people asked me about our time in India was, "How many servants did you have?" We only had one inside and one outside person. At that time you could still get a lot of servants for very few dollars.

But no, we were not losing talent. If anything our problem was that we were downsizing; we were cutting our staff. We offered buyouts that were of interest to some of our long-serving staff. They applied for special immigrants visa so they could live in the States. An employee with a minimum of 15 years service could apply. They were happy to take their buyout and go. Indeed, my computer specialist, cashier, building and maintenance man, a cultural specialist all got their visas for themselves and their immediate families.

Q: How did you find the various programs working in India particularly compared to Brazil and other places?

COLESHILL: We had a very busy, diverse program. We had an America center with a full library. We did not have or need an English teaching program although the regional English language officer worked with the university on materials development and in-service training for their teachers. The American studies research office in Hyderabad also worked with universities to develop or augment American studies programs. The International Visitors program and Fulbright program were very popular. We had many more candidates than slots to send them. And, of course, the speaker program had American specialists travel throughout India consulting with their counterparts, government officials, universities and other organizations on a full range of subjects of interest to both the U.S. and India.

One of our information officers was assigned to the ambassador's office to organize the ambassador's media schedule, write speeches, press releases, and be the embassy's press spokesman. There were two more information officers to manage an active media program.

The highlight of our cultural program was for India's 50th anniversary. Paul Taylor Dance Company, a modern dance company, performed in seven cities. They also conducted master classes, lectures, and interactive sessions with dancers and choreographers. They brought with them three dance floors that they donated at the end of their tour. The performances were in outlying areas where there were no American consulates. I was the control officer for the Lucknow performance. It was a huge, huge program and a massive undertaking. In order to finance such an expensive cultural presentation, we raised over $350,000 in cash, goods and services. United Airlines provided round trip transportation for the troupe, their luggage, equipment and dance floors. Air India provided the internal transportation. Hotels, food and beverage companies also provided services. In the end, it was probably the hardest logistical program I ever worked on, but one of the most successful.

Q: How well, sort of the Indian upper class, the people who sort of were involved in politics, were they infected by the old Indira Gandhi distain for American culture at all, or had that pretty well dissipated?

COLESHILL: I personally don't know the answer to that because I was not hobnobbing with the political ruling class. I was hobnobbing with Indian friends who were educated abroad, traveled abroad, and ran international businesses. They were upper class, pro-

American, pro-English, pro-Western, and that didn't mean that they were not proud of India. They were proud of what was going on in India, especially the liberalization of the economy that led to the economic boom. When India tested the nuclear device in the desert, I was absolutely amazed at how upbeat so many of our Indian friends were. They were really pleased and proud that India was going to become a nuclear power and made no bones about it. It wasn't an anti-American stance, it was the view that India was coming into the 21st century as a world power and be part of the world's economic engine.

Q: Was there a change or had there been a change between students going to Britain or the United States, or was the toll probably about equal?

COLESHILL: The flow was not just between Britain and the United States. It was also to Australia, Canada and Singapore. It was to a number of Western countries.

Q: What were you getting from your people who were dealing with it, the caliber of the Indian universities? Did it make sense to go to the West?

COLESHILL: Yes. It did. You could get reasonable university education in India. But to get a first rate education or an advanced degree, you needed to go abroad. If you wanted to emigrate to Australia or to the United States or to Canada or Britain, a degree from a university in that country would facilitate the visa application process. I don't know if that is, or was, true, but it was the conventional wisdom among our Indian friends. You know this better than anybody, right?

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: You graduated from the University of New Delhi, got a quite reasonable education, especially in engineering and computer sciences, as long as stayed in India. But it wasn't going to serve you as well if you wanted to at some point emigrate either temporarily or permanently away from India.

Q: You must have a highly skilled foreign national staff, didn't you?

COLESHILL: Yes, the mid- and senior staff members were very highly skilled both in languages and their fields of expertise. At the same time we had lower level folks who had limited if any English capability and no real job skills. It was a class system created by education, or lack of education.

When I arrived my predecessor told me that I would have to implement a reduction-in-force. She handed me her plan that included buy-outs that had been offered and taken. I had just come from Brazil where we had a big reduction-in-force. The public affairs officer was also newly arrived. I looked at the plan and wondered how the decisions had been made. I saw no analysis of how the individual offices would reallocate workload or program activities with less staff. I asked, "Is this what we're going to implement, or do we want to slow down here and take a look at it ourselves to make sure we're not leaving

holes in our staffing?" The public affairs officer agreed so my first task was talk with every supervisor about staffing and responsibilities. Implementing a reduction- in-force is not easy. Washington normally does not care how much money it costs in severance pay or how much money the reduction will save over time. Usually it's a number game. Washington tells posts the number of positions to reduce. So we rationalized the plan.

Having reviewed every position country-wide, whether it was on the reduction-in-force list or not, I was surprised to realize I hadn't focused on a man who opened the security door for me every morning. He was a very colorful man from Rajasthan. He saluted me right smartly as he opened the very heavy security door for me. One day it hit me, "Why is he doing this?" If we're letting people go, certainly this is one position we can do without. I noticed that he only did this for Americans. He did not open the door for the local staff or Indian visitors unless he recognized an important visitor. And he spoke no English and no Hindi. This was a pie-easy decision. Then I learned that he was not really an employee. He worked for the contractor, but still. But I didn't like the message that 25 people were losing their jobs, and Americans have someone opening the door for them. What was the message here? He was going to be gone one way or another, even though he worked for the contractor and I Washington would not give me credit for reducing the position.

I told my senior employee to tell the contractor to terminate him. One by one the staff came in to me and said, "You cannot fire this guy. He was been with us for 13 years. Please do not fire him. He has eight children," yadda yadda yadda. I didn't care if he had 24 children. They were not my responsibility, nor the responsibility of the U.S. government. Or so I thought. In the end I didn't have him fired. You know why? He earned $820 a year. A year!

Q: Oh, God.

COLESHILL: I said, "Okay, fine. I won't fire him, but he's not going to stand at the front door and open the door for American officers. He's going to run the freight elevator to ensure that computer equipment and such doesn't go out back door. Not a single person is going to walk out that door without having a signed piece of paper in English saying that they can take any equipment out."

Now the fact was that this man could not read English. The first thing we had to do was create a fool-proof system that did not set him up for failure. We created a tear sheet which my deputy or I signed identifying the equipment leaving the building and for what purpose. It was repeated on the top and bottom half. The bottom half came back to me. Do you know, after three months we noticed that we still were losing toilet paper and some office supplies, but we were not losing big stuff, and that was because he was at the back door. He more than earned his $820. I also didn't read in the newspaper that the Americans have an employee who just opens the door for them while they're firing Indian employees. There was an article in the paper. "Oh, the Americans are firing people yet they're renovating their office," which we indeed were doing because we had to give

up space and let the Library of Congress move into our building. Yes, there were people who were unhappy about that. But there wasn't much I could do about the renovations.

Q: Did you feel you were in competition with the Chinese?

COLESHILL: No. India and China did not have a very good relationship.

Q: Was somebody keeping an eye on what the Chinese programs were and we would respond or try to outflank them?

COLESHILL: No. If the Chinese had a cultural center, I never visited it. Perhaps someone in the political section, the CIA, or even the ambassador worried about it, but that worry didn't extend to my level.

Q: You were there up through the end of the Clinton administration, almost the end?

COLESHILL: Yes. I was there until early summer of 1998.

Q: Did you have to deal with the Lewinsky business?

COLESHILL: Did that break in early 1998? I'm not sure if it did while we were in India. Certainly Whitewater was discussed. A lot of Indians questioned why and how the president was being investigated, especially since he lost money on the deal. It was the same thing in Japan with Watergate. The Japanese thought that Nixon was the greatest thing since sliced bread and couldn't believe how two journalists could have brought down a president. That was beyond their belief.

It was also an issue back in Japan how was Voice of America going to report the news? How was a government entity going to report dirty business going on in the government? How could the Voice of America present itself as a free, fair, and independent news organ without slamming Nixon too badly. We had some of the same sort of questions.

Q: How did Frank Wisner relate to the U.S. Information Service program?

COLESHILL: Very well. Frank and our public affairs officer Ashley Wills were colleagues from a former posting. After the deputy chief of mission transferred, Ashley became the Frank's deputy. Frank was very forthcoming in hosting public diplomacy activities, representational functions, doing media interviews, letting us use the residence for cultural presentations and debriefing grantees. Frank understood the importance of pubic diplomacy programs.

Q: Were there any developments during the time that you were in India that particularly stand out?

COLESHILL: Like the nuclear testing?

Q: On the nuclear testing, how did we deal with that?

COLESHILL: I believe that we sent a letter of protest, and they noted it. Of course whether or not the ambassador knew in advance this was going to happen, I don't know. We woke up one morning, and they had tested it the night before in the middle of the desert. I suppose the ambassador did know because it had been in the news that they were going to do this, and Pakistan said that if they do it, they were going to do it. I'm sure there was lots of negotiation going on in the political section.

Q: How did you find relations on the personal level—you and your husband—with Indians?

COLESHILL: We loved it because we lived in an Indian community, we had Indian neighbors, and everyone was incredibly kind, interested in knowing us. Of course the first thing I had to do with almost any Indian that I met was let them know in no uncertain terms that I was not in the consular section and could not help them get a visa.

The visa line was interesting. There were folks, gangs you might call them, who arrived very early to take a place in line. Then other "gang members" would sell those places. Then the placeholders would get into the line again to have their positions sold. It was a huge scam but it happened on the public sidewalk. I was very clear when I met people that I worked downtown, I was part of the cultural center. If they wanted to borrow library materials, they could talk to, but I could do nothing about the visa line or with getting a visa.

I belonged to international women's club that consisted of half Indian, half international women. The Indians that I met there became good friends. We could have gone out every night of the week for three years if we had the energy and never necessarily would meet anybody within the embassy. Walter played duplicate bridge with a ten-table group. Of the 40 players, there were 38 Indian ladies, an Indian elderly gentleman and Walter. He had a wonderful time. I'd meet people and they'd say, "Oh! You are Walter's wife!"

Q: Sometimes when you get into ___experience. I'm playing a casual game of bridge, and all of a sudden you're dealing with real pros. There are people who take this damn seriously.

COLESHILL: Oh, yes! Walter does, too, so he was in his element. He particularly enjoyed his job at the embassy as visit coordinator. The position was rather *ad hoc* he worked only when he was needed to perform the administrative duties required to coordinate the visits. He had a job, but not a set schedule. He still had time to play bridge or squash, organize trips and travel.

We had so many congressional visitors. Having him as visit coordinator meant that no embassy employee had to be released from regular duties to coordinate the visit. Once the embassy realized that Walter could actually talk to the foreign ministry and set up appointments and that he was a very good representative of the U.S. embassy, they got

their money's worth of him because he even accompanied congressmen and congressmen's wives on various appointments and trips. If he had wanted to work full time, it probably could have become a full time job.

Q: Were these visitors, were they just looking at India, or were these business people?

COLESHILL: Neither. Business people came on their own steam, and they would meet either with the economic counselor or the commercial attaché. The embassy did not facilitate businessmen. These were congressmen, congressmen's aide, U.S. government officials.

Q: Of the various places… What was it, New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. Did any of them give you particular problems not necessarily because of the people there but just because of the situation?

COLESHILL: Mumbai was probably my biggest headache because it was so large and covered such a large area. They could have absorbed every resource I had for all four posts and still ask for more. Trying to keep them satisfied with the amount of money and the amount of programs without taking away the ability for Calcutta and Chennai to function was probably the hardest dance that I did. If I could have given the entire program budget to Mumbai, they would have spent it and done useful things with it, I'm sure.
Calcutta, on the other hand, was a much tougher place to mount programs. The Bengal region was much poorer than the areas covered by the other branch posts. The area was still governed by a left-wing party. Working with the university over there was difficult. The branch public affairs officer and her staff had worked much harder to get venues for our programs or get grantees to go to the U.S..

Q: Did you have any professional contact with Bollywood and all in Mumbai?

COLESHILL: No. The branch public affairs officer and the branch cultural affairs people in Mumbai did, and on one of my trips to Mumbai they gave me a tour of Bollywood. I had no professional contact with them but others did.

Q: Did you run across problems because we were being too nice to Pakistanis?

COLESHILL: Yes, there were comments about that, sure, but not that I would have characterized as problems.

Q: How was social life there?

COLESHILL: It was fabulous. If we had the energy, we could have gone out every night of the week and eaten out every night of the week. We had a good cook and a nice house for entertaining so we entertained a lot. The cook was a master at figuring what to serve to which religious group and how much food to prepare. Muslims, of course, ate no pork and drank no alcohol, Hindis ate no beef nor did they drink much alcohol, lots of folks

were vegetarians, some were vegans, and the Jains were extreme vegans. Their list of what they wouldn't eat included root vegetables. Another funny wrinkle was that some Hindis who were not normally vegetarians would become vegetarians on a given day of the week to show their love of a personal god. For example, if Krishna was their personal god and Tuesday was Krishna's day then that would be their vegetarian day. The cook was a master of skirting this minefield. Invariably we would serve buffet style. All the food would be carefully labeled to ensure no one ate something that was taboo.

Q: Did you find traffic a problem?

COLESHILL: Oh, traffic, yes! Traffic was a problem. We owned a Toyota Land Cruiser, so we sat up nice and high. When passing an elephant and he bumped the car, the car, not the elephant, moved!

Traffic was horrendous, and it wasn't just that they didn't drive well, which they didn't. Any given road, including the Delhi's eight-lane ring road, had trucks, buses, cars, motorcycles, motorbikes, motorized rickshaws, donkey or bullock rickshaws, bicycle rickshaws, bicycles and the occasional elephant with his *mahout*. Then add cows ambling or stationary on the roadway, street kids and dogs darting between traffic, people pulling or pushing wheelbarrows, you have a nightmare in the making. Everybody's moving at a different rate of speed, everybody's changing lanes, and not particularly even going in the correct lane direction. It was tough. I did not drive in New Delhi. It was as simple as that. It was horrible!

Q: Did you have trouble getting messengers, deliver things and that sort of thing?

COLESHILL: No, we had drivers who were used to the traffic.

Q: Speaking of the transport, was there a threat of terrorist attack, with Al-Qaeda or Pakistanis or this sort of thing against our people?

COLESHILL: No, I don't think so. There were things that happened. I mean a movie theater caught fire and the emergency exits were locked. There was stupid stuff, occasionally a bomb that would explode in a market, but one was never quite certain. It's not like anyone stepped forward and said, "Al-Qaeda is taking responsibility for that." No.
If there was anything that was worth worrying about we were out in public, it would be some sort of stampede. A hotel fire or something happening in a crowded place and something happened, I would be much more worried about getting in a crush of people.

Can I tell you one quick story about my maid?

Q: Absolutely, yes!

COLESHILL: Our cook-housekeeper was a wonderful Catholic woman who worked for us almost a year when she took her first vacation. The first Sunday that she was gone,

someone rang the doorbell, and there stood six people. They said, "Teresa gives us dinner." I said, "Well, Teresa is on vacation." Their response was, "Well, she always gives us dinner, and we're hungry." I said, "Well, I'm sorry. There's nothing that I can do for you, but please come back tomorrow night, and I'll be sure you get some food."
I asked my Indian neighbor for her advice. She said, "You can send them over to us, and we'll feed them when she's away, and when our servant is gone then we'll send people she feeds over to you." I said, "Okay, deal!" They went off next door, and I never heard from them again. I didn't know how many people Teresa fed out of our kitchen, but I didn't really care.

Q: Oh, my gosh. You left there when?

COLESHILL: I left in the summer of 1998.

Q: Where did you go after?

COLESHILL: After India I went to Vienna.

Q: Today is the 9th of March 2012. Ronnie, you had left India and were off to where, Austria?

COLESHILL: I left India in 1998, although my onward assignment was Vienna, I spent almost a year in Washington. I was assigned to be the director for the regional program office in Vienna.

Q: What did you do in the year you were in Washington?

COLESHILL: My title was special assistant to the director of management, which was a really great job at the time because before we left India, the consolidation was announced between State and U.S. Information Agency. It was a gap assignment.

After I was assigned to Vienna, the incumbent requested an extension that would take her to her retirement eligibility. They approved her extension and promised me that I would still have the assignment, only a year later.

I spent a year in Washington working on consolidation issues and brushing up my German.

Q: What was your attitude toward the consolidation?

COLESHILL: Jesse Helms, of course, wanted the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Information Agency, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency to come under the direct control of the Secretary of State. Consolidation was a political football. At a lower level, there was this misconception that there would be economies of scale; an integration of administrative functions; streamlined processes.

Politically I understood why it happened, but I think the U.S. taxpayer was not at all well served.

Q: From your observation while you were in Washington, how did the consolidation business work?

COLESHILL: Well, I'm probably biased being the little fish swallowed by the big whale. Everyone worked hard. Pat Kennedy was in charge on the State side and I think he was sincere in his efforts to make consolidation work well, not degrade our resources or programs. Our management people did things to prepare us for consolidation. However, State Department never prepared their people for how consolidation might impact them. For me personally, I benefited from consolidation.

What happened overseas, for example, public affairs officers, traditionally had car and driver. Big U.S. Information Service programs, like India, had five drivers and six cars. One of those cars and drivers was dedicated to the public affairs officer. All of a sudden those resources disappeared and were managed by the general service office, because we were going to have economy of scale. At some posts the general service officer didn't see the value of delivering the daily Washington File to news outlets. "Mail them," he said. Another would not let us use the cars to pick up our speakers at the airport since employees did not get airport transportation, or pick up speakers at the hotel to take them to their programs. What was really egregious was at one post the deputy chief of mission crashed a vehicle that had belonged to the U.S. Information Service. He then demanded that the public affairs officer pay for the replacement from the U.S. Information Service budget.

Q: With the absorption of U.S. Information Agency/U.S. Information Service into the State Department, where were you actually the day that it happened?

COLESHILL: I was in Vienna.

Q: Did you find you were dealing with the administrative officer and saying, "How are we going to work this out?"

COLESHILL: In my case specifically, I had an ambassador who was very supportive of what the regional program office was doing, and we had a very good, rational management counselor who said, "How are we going to make sure that you can continue to provide the services that you provide?" I personally and professionally actually benefited from the consolidation. I made minister counselor after we consolidated. U.S. Information Agency had no minister counselor position for anyone in management. I got a really good assignment at the State Department after I left Vienna. For me personally I benefited, but I don't believe that the program benefited.

Our program suffered tremendously, and it varied from country to country. When I arrived in Vienna and consolidation happened, the management counselor and I sat down and said, "Okay. What is it you need, and how can we make your activity continue to

function seamlessly?" Although I lost my building and maintenance man, he no longer worked for me, but he stayed in my building because that was a full-time job, so the GSO wasn't allowed to say, "Okay, Hans, you now work for me, and you have to report to the GSO building across the town, and I will tell you when you have to go over to the RPO building to do whatever needs to be done over there." We looked at ways to streamline that made sense. Our management counselor was the exception to the rule. I went away from Vienna feeling that I had been served well, and I hope Tim Roddy felt likewise that the consolidation worked well because we worked hard to make it happen

Q: Was this initiative taking place in Vienna rather than on instructions from Washington?

COLESHILL: The instructions from Washington were really let a thousand flowers bloom, and thousands of flowers with a lot of weeds bloomed. There were very broad guidelines, but most of what happened at post was left to the post to decide/implement.. For example, the public affairs officers were no longer head of agency, but rather head of section. He or she was one of those people in that hierarchy, and they didn't get dedicated cars, representational china and crystal and silverware, so why should the public affairs officer?

That indeed was fine! I could work with that. But to have a public affairs officer be eight months from leaving post and not having needed to bring representational china when he arrived at post to suddenly have it taken away and say, "Too bad! Not our problem that you can't even do a dinner for 12 people."

Q: As the usual thing, the embassy being the dominant partner sort of took over and took all the goodies.

COLESHILL: Indeed. As I said, if the public affairs officer is not going to be any different than the political counselor. the management counselor or the economic counselor, then I understand that. But at the same time the consolidation, the idea that this is going to happen October one, end of subject, wasn't logical. The fact that there wasn't any serious discussion about how the public affairs office was going to continue to do its job without access to vehicles and have their materials distributed with their cars.

How were they going to do business? That was never discussed in Washington. Public diplomacy would be in the bowels of the State Department if it were not for two things. One was Colin Powell, and two was the second Gulf war because suddenly when we were at war, public affairs, public diplomacy, became a reality and a necessity. If it hadn't been for those two things that happened, I don't think there would be a public affairs staff and a separate public affairs budget.

Congress walled our budget, and so it wasn't like suddenly the money that was appropriated in the past to U.S. Information Agency was going to fix the ambassador's roof or do other sort of embassy activities except that when the ambassador traveled, he

had an appointment with some journalist, he said, "Okay, this is a public affairs trip, and now public affairs has to pay for it." In the past that had never happened.

Q: What about the post? You were doing this regional work. Did that have much effect there, but were things so new that it really didn't make much difference?

COLESHILL: Every post had lots of complaints. We were providing IT support, grants management and procurement/contract support to various embassies. All of a sudden that was supposed to be done by the general services officer, certainly on procurement, but grant work stayed within the purview of public diplomacy. Only the public affairs officer had grant signing authority.

As I said there was very little actual guidance. There were huge, long cables that came out with what should and should not happen, but there wasn't actual program guidance. That took a long time to wash out. In many cases the U.S. Information Service administrative person was moved over to the embassy assigned to the budget and fiscal office. In some larger embassies, one went to the budget and fiscal did whatever the budget fiscal officer assigned them to do and another went to general services office. It was tough for the public affairs officer to know how much money he had at any given time.

Q: Here are these new countries and the Stans and the Baltics, and we're trying to reach out to them. Did you find you were cut off from various programs or doing it only half right or… Was this a problem?

COLESHILL: The biggest problem was transportation. Some embassies provided no transportation to visitors. Paris: for example. Now that the general services office managed the motor pool and won't authorize airport transportation for speakers, international visitors, Fulbright professors or scholars. The fix: An American public diplomacy officer or a senior local staff member would take a taxi to the airport, pick up the person, and take a cab to the hotel. The following morning, the embassy wouldn't provide transportation from the hotel to the embassy or the program venue. Again the public diplomacy office went back to the taxi fix. But the post lost its transportation resources and now had to spend new dollars for the fix.

Suddenly on October 1, 1999 program transportation, or the lack thereof, became the biggest hurdle to most public affairs officers. It was as simple at that. There was no transition, period. There was no understanding that, "Okay, the embassy does not provide transportation for this reason or that reason, but the public affairs office does for this group of people. What can we do to make it work? That was the missing element.

Q: I assume this was being fed back to Washington.

COLESHILL: Nobody in Washington wanted to know or care.

Q: I would think that in something like this they'd say, "Okay, we're going through a teething period and let us know what's happening, and we'll work this out."

COLESHILL: No, because remember the management office who would have wanted to hear these things was dispersed all over the State Department, too, and we no longer had a management person/office who was responsible for U.S. Information Service programs. All our regional bureaus were absorbed in the State Department's regional bureaus. Procurement went into the procurement section at state. The IT people went into the IT section at state. Suddenly they were all dispersed also and trying to figure out how to do their business on their end.

Q: How did you find at the more junior ranks at U.S. Information Service? I talked to somebody here, an older person, saying that I'm picking up the impressions of the old people. You and I are part of that. The young officers were really…their Costa policy and more promotion open up to them and all. I'm dubious about that, but did you find the ___ officers felt that, "Gee, now we've got a better handle on things?"

COLESHILL: I'm not sure that was the way they felt, but they were not as entrenched in the old ways. First of all, my problem with most of my colleagues was they just couldn't get over consolidation. We had lots of people like that, and I asked several, "You're not happy here. Why don't you just retire?" They were hoping consolidation would fail and we would be unconsolidated. Fat chance. But a young officer, I'm not entirely sure they said, "Ah, we had all these other promotions opportunities." Perhaps some did.

Being part of State everyone had to stand on the visa line. We had been exempt from that. Public diplomacy folks are generally extroverts and like that aspect of the job. Center director jobs are often second or third tour positions and some of the most fun jobs in an embassy. You're in charge of a little bit of money, you make program decisions, you're in charge of supervising staff, you're out meeting lots of people in your town. It's fun. An exchanges officer is another one of those positions. Before consolidation, the competition for those positions was limited to U.S Information Service officers in those grades. Now State Department people who realize those are fun jobs are also competing with them. True the public diplomacy people can compete for jobs in the economic, political and consular cone, but is that what they really want? Perhaps some.

Also when we came over, we came over with a certain number of senior positions, and there was a feeling that those senior positions were not necessarily going to remain part of public diplomacy because some public diplomacy positions were downgraded because there is no counselor or minister counselor counterpart in the State Department. Once they downgraded the senior cultural job in Paris, for example, what to happen to that senior position? Will it be kept as a public diplomacy position lost in the great human resources milieu and become the new senior position in the economic bureau?

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: U.S. Information Agency officers had their share of blame, too, in all of this. Many of them wanted to make no accommodations, and their rhetoric, their attitude about "my dishes, my lawn mower, my car, my driver," and all they did was complain and complain and complain. They wouldn't say, "Look. This is what I need to do. How do I get this job done?" Many of them thought, "Okay, I'm just going to go to the ambassador and the ambassador will understand that I need to have cars." Cars and the china were probably the biggest things that people fought over. "The ambassador's going to understand." Most ambassadors didn't want to hear it. The usual response was, "Work it out with the management counselor," and that was the right answer.

I've a friend that retired here. Whenever the subject of State Department comes up, he brings up consolidation and how awful it was. That was in 1999, and he's now been retired three or four years now, and this still rankles him. And do you know what? He got a very good job as a result of consolidation!

Q: Let's talk about Vienna. What was your job?

COLESHILL: Consolidation happened two months after my arrival. I was the director of the regional program office. The office was not co-located in the embassy. I did not report to anyone in Vienna, but rather to a regional office in Frankfurt. I had a $2+ million operating budget; a staff of 35 including four American Foreign Service officers. We provided a wide range of operational and program support mainly to the former Soviet Union and eastern bloc embassies. In practical terms, I had a design staff and print shop with big four-color professional-quality print press that produced materials in 31 languages. I ran a mini-Foreign Service Institute for foreign national public diplomacy employees. The computer people on my staff provided web design and other computer expertise to our client posts. Two regional librarians and one English language officer rounded out the program support.

Who was the ambassador when you were there?

COLESHILL: Katherine Hall.

Q: Was she a political appointee?

COLESHILL: She was.

Q: How did you find her?

COLESHILL: I liked Katherine and still think of her as a friend.

Q: I was thinking not so much the personal relationship, but how did she operate and make contact within the Austrian community?

COLESHILL: She spoke German. She was very well liked by the Austrian government, and very well respected. But I'm going to say something about friendship in a

professional environment like the embassy. You only become good friends with people in an embassy for whom you have professional respect. If you can't work with someone or you think they're lazy, incompetent or arrogant, you're not going to become good friends with that type of person.

I have wonderful Foreign Service friends from most of my posts, various agencies, of different grades and areas of expertise. The one common factor is that I respected what each did at the embassy.

Anyway, I had a lot of respect for Katherine, and she was very supportive in making sure the consolidation happened smoothly and easily. She was very highly thought of, and when she left, the prime minister hosted a fabulous party for her and invited everyone on the country team and even people the next level down. Under normal circumstances we would not be invited that sort of social gathering. The prime minister knew she was well liked within the embassy. The local staff gave her a farewell party to which no American was invited. Just Katherine, her husband and every local employee at the embassy.

Q: What was her background?

COLESHILL: She owns a vineyard in California. She and her husband were good friends with Al Gore, who was then the vice president.

Q: In Austria did you find a different twist or it was different than you imagined, coming from a German background?

COLESHILL: I was six when I left Germany. I visited Vienna in 1972. By the time of my assignment, I had been to London numerous times, Paris, Rome, Munich, Frankfurt, Budapest, and Belgrade. But even so, Vienna was a far more sophisticated city than I imagined. Two things did surprise me. Vienna is wonderful because it has everything that London, Paris, and Rome have but on a smaller, more manageable scale. And they speak German quite differently than the Germans do. There's lots of French influence.

Q: Did we have any objective or goal or something in Austria that was unique to Austria?

COLESHILL: During the Gulf war, the Austrians let us let us use their air space to fly supply flights. That was incredibly important.

Q: How did this sit with the Austrians?

COLESHILL: The Austrian citizens? They didn't know.

Q: They what?

COLESHILL: They did not know. It was not publicized. When the air traffic controllers found our airplane, then the Austrian government said, "Oh, Oops!" It was one off, but

they let us do it. The defense attaché and the ambassador were the two pivotal people to make that happen.

Q: Were we concerned with our involvement in the Middle East with the Austrians?

COLESHILL: No, I don't think so. Again, I'm probably not the person who can speak to that most authoritatively because remember my job. I dealt with Eastern European countries and the newly established countries: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Georgia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, before it fell apart. It was within those embassies that I had my day-to-day working contacts I did not even report to anybody in Austria.

But I went to the country team meeting in Vienna when I was in town. I was treated very much as if I worked for the ambassador. She never said, "Don't forget you work for me!" When she needed something done, believe me, I'd do it. I didn't need to be told to take care of the ambassador to the country in which I'm a resident.

Q: Who was the DCM at the time?

COLESHILL: Robert Deutsch was there at the beginning. Actually, he was there almost the entire time that Ambassador Hall was. Dan Weygandt came toward the end when Lyons Brown was the ambassador.

Q: He wasn't the man who later was accused of spying for the Soviet Union?

COLESHILL: That was much earlier.

Q: Oh, yes.

COLESHILL: Felix Bloch. That was much, much earlier. He was accused of spying, but he was never charged.

Q: Was there concern, did you sense from your friends in talking and all, about the far right political party in Austria?

COLESHILL: That was a huge problem because Jörg Haider was the head of the Austrian Freedom Party which was very hard right wing,

Q: But it's Haider, really.

COLESHILL: Sorry?

Q: It was Haider.

COLESHILL: It was Haider, yes. He became part of the coalition government although he personally did not join the government. He was the governor of Carinthia, and he liked

being the governor, so he was going to continue as governor of Carinthia. But his party took a number of cabinet positions in Wolfgang Schüssel's coalition government. At the time, Portugal was head of the European Union and decided to impose sanctions on Austria. Madeleine Albright said, "Yes. We're also going to impose sanctions against Austria," and told Katherine, to issue the *de marche.* Katherine said, "I don't think so. This was a free and fair election, and we have no right to interfere in a free and fair election. We might not like the election results, but we have to accept them. " Madeleine reminded Katherine that she, Madeleine, was the secretary of state, and she, Katherine, was to do what she was told. Katherine told Madeleine that she would take the issue to the White House. I gather that the behind the scenes Katherine went to Al Gore and pressed her case that sanctions against a free and fair election was a bad idea. I also heard rumor Madeleine wanted to have Katherine recalled. When it finally got to Bill Clinton, who is a pretty smart cookie, agreed with Ambassador Hall's reasoning. Madeleine Albright was, I understand, pissed beyond belief that Katherine won that round.

Q: We get caught in this trap of preaching one thing but then if it doesn't turn out the way we want it to, then… This is the sort of thing that one can… Essentially I'd go along with the ambassador. You don't like it, you may slow things down, and coast through this particular period.

COLESHILL: Right. Katherine had to go to Washington to report personally to Madeleine initially every four weeks. Then it stretched out to every six weeks. Sometimes she would get there and Madeleine wouldn't even be there to receive her, so that was a power struggle that Madeleine was playing.

But Katherine Hall could not have any contact with anyone from the Austrian Freedom Party whatsoever. There were some anxious weeks when it looked like the economic minister was going to come from Austrian Freedom Party. This would have really hampered the embassy. But as it turned out, that person did not get the economic portfolio, and he ended up doing something else that was not as important to the bilateral relationship. But when Katherine was at *the* premier ball Viennese ball, Haider came over to her table and asked her to dance. [laughter] Of course there were five million press people taking pictures because this was the social event of the year. Katherine talked about it at the next country team meeting and said, she looked up at him and she said, "I don't think this is a good idea. No, thank you."

[laughter]

He knew what he was doing, too.

Q: Oh, yes.

COLESHILL: He has since died in a one-car accident, and the word is he was drunk, so he is no longer with us.

Q: How did you find the Austrians to deal with?

COLESHILL: Well, there again, my dealings with Austrians were pretty much my local staff and representatives of the companies that provided services to us. The FedEx and DHL reps, people at the various hotels we used for our training program, some supply warehouses, those sort of folks, not the political movers and shakers. Austrians are all wonderfully efficient and very nice and easy to work with.

Q: With this publications business and all, what sort of things were you turning out for the rest of the European countries?

COLESHILL: Moldova, for example, did a trafficking of women program. We designed invitations, posters, brochure and other print materials. All those materials were then printed in Moldovan and Russian. The country was considering stronger anti-trafficking laws. One of the brochures described U.S. laws. That brochure had the U.S. laws in English as well as Moldovan and Russian. The context of the materials were always at the behest by the country ordering them, but we designed the materials and translated the text and sent the posts incredibly professional materials..

We did some quarterly magazines for some embassies. Russia, for example, had a quarterly magazine that we would lay out and print that was all in Russian. We printed in 37 languages.

Q: Good God!

COLESHILL: We did the art in embassy catalogue. We did that for not only Europe, but we did that for parts of Africa and Middle Eastern countries, too. Of course the art and embassy catalogue would also be done in two languages. It would be done in English and whatever the host country language was. We did lots and lots of invitations. And we would design stock invitations for Fourth of July.

We also designed Christmas calendars that posts could use with their contacts. The calendars had Americana photos, and those were stock issued except a few countries said, "Okay, we want to order the calendar, but we need to have it in Bulgarian as well as English," so after we printed the calendar for however many calendars we printed, but before they were collated we would overprint with the second language.

We did a lot. And we did a lot of training, and I also had regional computer people on my staff to help with computers, and I had regional procurement people, so we would do the procurement for especially Slovenia and other smaller offices.

Q: This is a time when we were basically training people like Slovenia or Slovakia or the Baltic countries. We hadn't had a staff there before.

COLESHILL: That's right. We hadn't. I got there in 1999, and some of those new embassies had opened up as early as 1991 or so. The problem was many of the people that the embassies hired initially didn't stay very long. They didn't have the job

qualifications, or perhaps the government had sent the people we had to hire. In response to the training need in the early 1990, we sent someone from my office to do one-on-one training. That was a long, tedious and expensive proposition. It wasn't much of a leap to organize training programs in Vienna and then have the staff come to us.

We often have the idea that we're going to train ourselves out of our training business, and that just doesn't happen. Then Colin Powell became secretary of state, and what was his big shtick? Training. He came from the military, and what does the military do? When they're not fighting wars, they're training to fight wars. He was appalled when he learned how little training Foreign Service officers received, never mind that most foreign national employee got almost none. Suddenly the emphasis on training was much higher, and we were poised. We were already doing this, and so it was merely a matter of partnering with the Foreign Service Institute, and suddenly we're training Americans.

We actually did training programs in Vienna that had Americans and local employees together. Not every American appreciated that, I fully admit, but I thought, "Boy, isn't this the way of the future that we're going to have a senior local employee sitting next to a Foreign Service officer and they're going to get the same training whether it was in a leadership, management training role or something concrete like giving presentations, public speaking or using PowerPoint"

It was the finest job I had. I think I keep saying that. But it's true.

Q: ___ be very easy to get Foreign Service term challenging. Normally as we move post to post we have experienced people from the country to really do most of the work, and really know what they're about.

COLESHILL: Indeed! When I arrived at Vienna, I had an American deputy, and I had a very senior assistant, a grade 12, the highest grade possible. He managed the money. Believe me, our program was really diverse. Posts paid us for the materials we designed and printed for them. We ran our own building, the Fulbright commission was in our building, and they paid us a little bit of rent. We were run like a business.

Here I had this very senior guy who knew all the ins and outs of the budget and the programs we were doing. He was Austrian, and very efficient, but he didn't have God's clue how to manage his staff. He had never had supervisory skills workshop because no one ever thought it was important. Then when we were consolidated, the personnel people looked at his position description and downgraded him to an 8! From a 12 to an 8! When he resigned, personnel asked me, "Oh, why did Hannes resign? He had 20 years in with us and he's such a good employee," and everybody was shocked. Give me a break!

Q: Tell me. You left Vienna when?

COLESHILL: I left Vienna in 2003.

Q: In the initial phases how did the Austrians react to our moving into Iraq and Afghanistan, and what did we do about it U.S. Information Agency- or public diplomacy-wise?

COLESHILL: I can't truly answer that. I know that they gave us permission to use their air space for supplies. Certainly they were not publicly for the war though once the war was declared, they publicly said, "Okay, now that you're in there you best win." Again, this wasn't part of my portfolio. My job was covering and providing services for the other missions in Eastern Europe. Because of consolidation, of course, we took on a big added workload where in the past I only did the art and embassy catalogue of the countries I covered, and suddenly I was being asked to do art and embassy catalogues for all of Europe, for parts of North Africa and the Middle East. I had quite a busy place.

Q: How did our embassy in Moscow fit into your regional activities because you were dealing in a territory that they had? Was there a problem there?

COLESHILL: No, not really, because the sort of things that we provided, we had historically provided to Russia. America illustrated magazine, Russian literature, embassy produced material that we designed and printed in the Russian language. We didn't have a consulate in Turkmenistan, so the embassy and the public affairs officer probably did rather minimal work for that regions. I think the biggest hang-up was the need for additional human and financial resources. I don't know if Moscow and/or St. Petersburg had to give up some resources to help open those embassies. I know that neither we nor State got additional resources from Congress to help open those new embassies. Colin Powell got additional position for his diplomatic readiness initiative.

Q: When did you leave Vienna?

COLESHILL: 2003.

Q: Where did you go?

COLESHILL: The interesting thing with my departure was how, now I'm a management officer, and there are no more U.S. Information Agency management jobs, I had to compete with State senior management officers and go through the State Department bidding process. I'll tell you, that was the most painful thing I've ever done.

Q: That's very top level, too.

COLESHILL: That's very top level, right. My State friends all advised me to pay my way to Washington to interview for any job I really wanted. This was somewhat of an anathema for U.S. Information Service people in part because we all knew each other anyway. All I'd have to do is pick up the phone and call Kent Obee and say, "I'm interested in bidding on (whatever), and I could tell from the language he used whether or not I was going to be a viable candidate for that job. I'd known Kent for 20 years. Now I had to interview for jobs in Washington with people I've never met. One guy asked me,

"You've never been an admin counselor. You've never even been a general services officer. Why should I hire you?"

I wasn't ready for the question. I gave him an answer about how I could manage anything, because management is all about how you allocate resources, human and financial. I gave him an answer, but I wasn't happy with my answer. I really wasn't happy with the question. As I walked out of that interview I thought, "You know, you should just retire. This is too painful. There's no reason to go through this." But the truth was I had to move back into a house in Washington for two years land wanted to do it on full salary.

The guy actually did me a favor. I took a look at my PAR (personnel administrative record, is that what it's called?)

Q: You might explain what that is.

COLESHILL: It's the record an of employee's entire history in chronological listing assignments, titles of position, training and any awards received.

Q: It's your work record in truncated form.

COLESHILL: Right. Later I learned that most officers looked at the PAR minutes before the interviewed and nothing else. And my PAR didn't look anything like my counselor rank colleagues. So truthfully this guy had a legitimate question. Maybe not phrased eloquently, probably because he had made up his mind that he wasn't going to hire me. What I needed to do was address this question before it was asked.

I was interviewed by the principal deputy secretary for the economic bureau. He said, "Oh, so nice to meet you. I understand that you're interested in the executive director position," and I said, "Yes, I am, and I would like to tell you why you should consider me even though I haven't been a management counselor or even a general services officer."

Q: Wow!

COLESHILL: He said, "Yes, tell me." Then I gave me a better-rehearsed shtick about I could manage a nuclear power plant even without knowing anything about nuclear power. All I need to understand are what the requirements are to keep it running. Who was in charge of the day-to-day operation? Safety? Maintenance? What resources I might have. Where to go for more resources so I could network with that office. Then I said, "I've never been an economic officer, but I know you're going to want to fill jobs. You're going to want enough money to do your programs, you have an IT section. You're going to want it to run smoothly and efficiently. I've done all that under different job titles." And I got the job!

Q: Aha!

COLESHILL: I became the executive director of the economic bureau the summer of 2003.

Q: In my interviews—this going way back—somebody who unfortunately had died before I started this program, but there was a woman who ran, who had that job, who was renowned, named Frances Wilson. Maybe you've heard her name. She was such a power within the State Department that she developed a tremendous cadre and loyal following of economic officers that lasted well beyond her tenure there.

COLESHILL: Tony Wayne, a political-cone officer, was the assistant secretary, and Shaun Donnelly, an economic-cone officer, was the deputy assistant secretary. Tony believed that the economic officers needed to feel like they had a home bureau much like Mary Ryan did for consular officers during her long tenure in consular affairs bureau. They needed to have a bureau that was going to help them through the bidding process, mentor them, ensure that they got the right sort of job. Tony and Shaun spent many hours with economic officers, as they were rotating, even if they were not trying to get a job in economic bureau. Obviously we were actively trying to recruit the best and the brightest for the economic bureau. We also reached out to every new class of junior officers. We hosted a round table discussion with small refreshments so they could get the feel of the bureau.

Q: How did you find the atmosphere of being here in Washington in a much more structured personnel system and having undergone the consolidation and all?

COLESHILL: I was very happy that I got an executive director job. Before I got that assignment, I was offered a job at the board of examiners. I would have happily taken that but I really, really wanted to be an executive director, and I knew I wasn't going to become an executive director of a regional bureau. They had so many management counselors they needed to reward, that I probably wouldn't even get a deputy job. I knew that if I was going to be an executive director I needed to go to one of the functional bureaus. I had worked with several economic officers who gave me good references. I was very happy, and for me it was a learning curve. As much as I say I can manage people, I had to understand what we were doing and why we were doing it, and I had an assistant secretary who was incredibly hard working. Tony arrived before everybody else and left after everyone else. I got emails from him time-stamped, 10 o'clock at night. His attention to detail was unbelievable.

The hardest part of my job was dealing with the civil service staff. We had many unhappy secretaries who had been at their grades for 15 to 20 years. They wanted to get promoted, they wanted more than a step increase. Their common cry was, "I never get a raise." "I get no respect." I could have spent my entire life just dealing with the secretaries and making no inroads. They were burned out. They wanted that paycheck, but they didn't want to put themselves out to go find another job.

Q: I can recall as an FSO and coming up against that when sometimes… I heard Sarah Case talking about how many days of leave they had acquired and thought, "My God, it

never occurred to me!" You know what I mean? It just wasn't part of my calculation. Unless you were really sick or something, but this attention to the perks and not to the job and anything that's required to come overtime was out of the question. It was a whole different attitude. It shocked me.

COLESHILL: Part of it was they were single moms with latch-key kids. They were in carpools, and the carpool left at ten minutes after five, and they couldn't use the high-occupancy lane if there weren't four people in the car.

Q: Oh, yeah.

COLESHILL: Add those legitimate concerns to the fluffy stuff, it becomes overwhelming. The head of my computer office lived in West Virginia. You can imagine he had quite a long commute. He asked me if he could telecommute one day each week. I said, "What are you going to do from home? You're here to keep the system going, to help people as they're having problems with their computers. You can't update the system from home. He said, "Well, I have to write employee evaluations," and I said, "When you're writing evaluations you tell me, and you can telecommute that day." Then he asked for a flexible work schedule. He wanted to work 10 hours a day to condense his workweek to four days. I was floored! What's wrong with this picture? You know what? This was a really clever guy. He really knew his computer stuff, and he was in charge of the computer staff of six. He was going to supervise them from home? Give me a break!

Q: I was in personnel for a while and these personnel officers would meet and settle assignments. Did you find this an interesting procedure?

COLESHILL: No, I did not find it *interesting*. I found it painful. I found it a huge waste of taxpayer money both in terms of productivity—especially in terms of productivity—and actual cost for people to come and interview for a job. These people are all employees who have been tested, screened, interviewed and vetted for employment. Evaluations and personnel files are available. I had a human resources officer on my staff. She spent an inordinate amount of time meeting and settling assignments. And this was after the officer met with the assistant secretary, deputy assistant secretary, the head of the office with the vacant position and maybe even the incumbent.

Q: This is personnel.

COLESHILL: This wasn't just for senior positions. It was for every position. I had no less than six people pay their way, or they were already in the States, come to Washington to petition me for the job. They called to say, "I'm going to be there on Tuesday." I couldn't say, "No, I can't see you on Tuesday. How about next Thursday?" In fact there were two of them I didn't personally didn't think much of their presentation of themselves, but it's like we're suddenly IBM, and these people work for Dell, and we're going hire them! ?" I thought, "Why? Why do I have to see these people?" It was the process. I couldn't just opt out as these folks were going to see the regional bureaus,

other functional bureaus and were considering overseas positions. We needed to play our part in this game.

Another big waste of time was the annual panels reviewing each Foreign Service evaluation. This was another worldwide phenomena. We had to establish panels to save officers from themselves. Why? So an officer could be told he was shooting himself in the foot? That there were typos and misspellings in the evaluation? Personally, if you submit crap to the promotion panel, the panel should take that into consideration during their deliberations.

I served on a promotion panel, and that was an interesting process. You read some of these things and wonder what the ambassador is doing since this mid-grade officer is running the embassy, political section, or whatever. I knew a couple people being considered for promotion and thought, "Boy, this isn't true." The panel, of course, could only consider information in the files. We were not allowed to discuss anyone who we might have worked with at some time. And rightly so. But still.

Q: I sat on a promotion panel from OC to MC at one time. We were given 40 efficiency reports, and we had to rank them. I was surprised at how the reports all seem to say almost the same thing, yet when you put people together, we don't rank them about the same. There's something in the joint, seeing your officers looking at efficiency reports…

COLESHILL: Sure, because we all know the nuance. This person should be considered for immediate promotion. Well, every person is considered for "immediate promotion." This person "should be considered," is the kiss of death. Because no evaluator knows the entire pool of candidates being considered for promotion, the evaluation can no longer read, this officer "should be promoted immediately."

Then we have the area for improvement. Was that part of the evaluation process when you were in the service?

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: Well, you know the "looney-tunes" stuff that went in that block. Then the panel was not allowed to use the area for improvement comment unless the comment was documented in the body of the evaluation itself. Then there were people who would put something in the area for improvement that was really a strength. "This person has great attention to detail which is sometimes the enemy of perfect." Or something like that.

Q: Oh, yeah.

COLESHILL: When the bidding cycle started, we spent hours reviewing candidates and files in order to actively recruit known and highly recommended candidates in hopes they wanted to work in the economic bureau. We had historical jobs that no one wanted. Everyone wanted to do trade negotiation, but positions in international finance and development went begging.

Human resources had very little say about assignments. It mostly happened at the regional and functional bureau level. My deputy in Vienna was a public diplomacy officer. We actually made a perfect team. My strength was management; his was public affairs. He transferred in the middle of my tour. I was given no say in his replacement. That was highly irregular. The position went to a general services officer. I know that the regional bureau slam-dunked this down my throat thinking, "Now we've got a real State person in there to keep this woman on the straight and narrow." He became a believer that the regional program office provided a vital service to client embassies and could do more if additional resources. I think he blotted his copybook.

Q: How were you settling in? Did you find being back in Washington fun?

COLESHILL: Oh, yes. First of all, there was only one assignment that I didn't really like, and that was Zaire. I had been in Washington at other times. We had purchased a house just before we left to go to Vienna, so this was our first time moving into this house. We enjoyed that. We lived in Falls Church, so I had a very easy commute. I lived a mile from the subway. Walter drove me to the subway in the morning but I walked home at night.

We both love the city of Washington and seriously considered remaining there after retirement. The personal aspect of being in Washington was great. Professionally, I really felt like I had succeeded not just within the U.S. Information Agency, but also the State Department. I went much further in the service than I ever dreamed possible. Shortly after I got to the economic bureau, I was promoted to minister counselor as a result of my work in Vienna. I had successfully competed with management counselors in London, Paris, Moscow, executive directors in regional and functional bureaus. That was very, very gratifying.

As far as the economic bureau was concerned, I liked and respected Tony Wayne, the assistant secretary, and Shaun Donnelly, the principal deputy assistant secretary. I had interesting job responsibilities.

Q: How did you feel the officer cadre of economic officers? A lot time ago it was hard to find economic officers who had been trained, and we had to train them and all. At this time did you find you had a pretty good cadre?

COLESHILL: Yes we did, but it was interesting when you said they hadn't been trained. Hadn't been trained to do what?

Q: One, report on economics.

COLESHILL: Oh. There was some general economic and reporting training at the Foreign Service Institute for the A-100 classes. There was a lot more targeted training such as international property rights, trade negotiation, conflict diamonds. Of course there was an annual masters degree program at Princeton University for mid-level economic officers.

Is the Foreign Service Institute going to teach an Foreign Service officer or even a political officer how to write reports? How to gather the pertinent data? How to analyze the data? I wouldn't think so. I think a supervisor or mentor would be a better teacher. This should be on-the-job training.

This is what happened to me right after consolidation. Prior to consolidation, I would sign my name on telegrams, not the ambassador. Now my cables went through the deputy chief of mission and had the ambassador's name on the bottom. My first cable after consolidation dealt with consolidation issues.

Bob Deutsch, the deputy chief of mission in Vienna, said he wanted to talk to me about that telegram." He critiqued it. He said, "Everything you say here is perfectly fine and I could sign off on this, but in Washington this telegram will raise a few eyebrows. It doesn't sound like a State Department telegram." I said, "Hmmm. Well, what would make it sound like a State Department telegram?" He said, "For openers, we never say 'we.' We would say 'the post'."

He took the tine to go through my cable paragraph by paragraph noting where it needed to be tightened, how my word usage sounded too much like USIA-speak, especially since this cable was going to State folks, not cross-walked folks. I went back to the office, redrafted it with his recommended fixes, and I thought, "I'm going to have to read more State Department cables. Truly read them. Read them for format, not just for content." He was right. They sounded different. I really appreciated what he did for me. Would I have picked this up by osmosis? I don't think so.

Q: Probably not.

COLESHILL: But he took the time and effort to mentor me, and several months later he said, "You really got into the State Department cable stuff." I said, "Well, thanks to you, I did." I think my cables got more favorable responses because I didn't sound like an outsider. That got me thinking about other differences between State Department and the U.S. Information Agency culture. During employee evaluation season, I figured the easiest way for me to understand the differences was to read as many evaluations as I legally could. I volunteered to be on the embassy evaluation review panel. I read those evaluations very carefully for tone and syntax. The forms and guidelines were the same, but not the way they read.

When I got my own evaluation I thought, "God, he says I'm doing all these things for all these countries, but he's never said why it's important." In one person's evaluation that I read as a review panel member, the rating officer wrote, "So, why is this important?" and then went on to say why. I went back to my rating officer who was in Frankfort, and I said, "You know, this is very nice. I really appreciate this rating. But you haven't said why any of this is important." "Oh," he said, "You know the promotion panel will see that from the work requirements. They'll understand." I thanked my rating officer for his very kind words and how gratified I was with the job and his supervision. So in the rated

officer's comments, I detailed why it was important to produce public diplomacy materials in 37 languages. And I was promoted to minister counselor.

Q: Aha! Ronnie, how long did you do this job?

COLESHILL: In the economic bureau?

Q: Yeah.

COLESHILL: Two years.

Q: Then what?

COLESHILL: I was going to retire. A friend of mine was head of the inspection office, and she suggested I become an inspector for one year so I could become one when-actually-employed rehired annuitant for the office of inspection. Walter and I talked about that and he said, "Well, one more year. That'll get you past your 60th birthday and 35 years of service. Why not? It'll give us the opportunity to travel." I was happy to agree, provided it was *only* one more year.

Q: What year was this?

COLESHILL: 2005

Q: Okay. Where did you inspect?

COLESHILL: I was the lead management inspector. The first inspection was to Bogotá and Lima.

Q: Let's take Bogotá. How long were you there?

COLESHILL: The total inspection was six or seven weeks, probably three weeks.

Q: What was the situation? Was it an emergency inspection or just a regular inspection?

COLESHILL: All of mine were routine inspections because their time had come.

Q: How did you find it?

COLESHILL: Well, I thought Bogotá was kind of interesting because they still got danger pay and yet they allowed families including children. There was still some random terrorist activity. The U.S. government had a large, well-funded drug-interdiction program that, naturally, was not popular with the drug lords. I personally thought that if a post is dangerous enough for danger pay, it's too dangerous for family members..

Q: Having that attitude must have made you rather unpopular.

COLESHILL: Indeed. The ambassador did not like hearing this.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

COLESHILL: William Wood. He was not happy hearing that we were including an informal recommendation that the office of allowances review the matter and the bureau rule on the issue of dependents at post.

Q: It sounds like if I were the ambassador I'd ask the military attaché to lend me a grenade and at an appropriate and safe time toss it nearby or something like that!

COLESHILL: Something like that, yes!

Of course it was really interesting because when we got the security briefing the advice was, "Don't go out on the streets alone," and, "Be sure you're always traveling in more than pairs, that there are three or four of you." They gave us a big whoop-de-do, but when I spoke with some of the American officers they poo-poo'd all that. "Oh, no. We just go about our business. Our kids go to clubs."

Sweet 16 is a big, big, big thing for Colombian girls. They have big parties in hotels and the American kids would of course be invited and go. I thought, "Well, if that's what they're going to do and the parents aren't worried about it, then they didn't deserve danger pay." As I said at the end of the day we did discuss it with the office of allowances, and my understanding was that nothing happened. They were able to keep their danger pay and their dependents.

Q: The guerilla war had been going on for a long time. It wasn't over, still isn't over.

COLESHILL: It's probably never going to be over.

Q: With the families there, had drugs at all hit the teenage kids, our teenage kids and the school and that?

COLESHILL:. I don't remember the name of the drug, but it's used for date rape. It is slipped into the girl's drink, and she becomes a compliant partner but doesn't remember. That was a serious problem.

Q: Did you find that the reporting was inhibited by the inability to get to some places?

COLESHILL: No, I don't think so. Certainly that wasn't one of the things that came out during the inspection. One of the biggest issues was the drug interdiction. I've forgotten the name of the bureau that does drugs and thugs. Is it INL?

Q: Yeah, something that is lumped together with human right.

COLESHILL: Right. There was a huge amount of grant money that went to eradicating the drug production. Almost every flower that you buy in a supermarket in the United States comes from Colombia. They have vast shipping networks and lots of land to grow poppies. We certainly believed that the Colombian government was sincerely trying to stop the shipments, but it was an uphill battle.

Q: Were there any—other than what we're talking about—particular problems in Colombia at the time that the inspectors would want to take a look at?

COLESHILL: I can't recall any. The inspection process was to have the embassy management and every American employee complete a pre-inspection questionnaire. After our analysis, we worked with the regional and functional bureaus to identify potential problem areas. Of course, there were standard protocols we followed. But I can't remember anything out of the ordinary except that we did have one inspector with us that did nothing other than look at the grants for the drug money because it was so large. That was the only post where we had that.

Q: Where else did you go?

COLESHILL: After that we went to Peru. We spent about three weeks there as well.

Q: Was Fujimori still the president or had he left?

COLESHILL: He had already gone.

Q: Who was the ambassador then?

COLESHILL: Curt Struble

Q: What were you looking at in Lima?

COLESHILL: As you may recall, a lot of smaller posts do not have a personnel officer, or human resources officer as they're now called. The regional human resources officer was in Chile, but rarely came to Lima, certainly not as often as Lima needed her.

Q: There's not that personal touch.

COLESHILL: It isn't. Posts need a human resources officer on site. By the time that regional arrives, whatever the crises two weeks ago had been was managed or more likely mismanaged in some way. I think foreign national staff can do an awful lot of things and do them really well. But there are two issues. One, there can be a conflict of interest with local salary and benefit issues. And two, the local staff is rarely properly trained in American personnel issues. In the end the management counselor who often has never taken a human resources course, or worse the DCM, who probably has fewer management skills, make human resources decisions.

Q: This is endemic in the system, isn't it?

COLESHILL: It is. We tried to deal with it, one post at a time, and had a certain measure of success in the long run. The protocol now is a cadre of regional human resources officers posted in Miami, and so at least they have no home post or home ambassador to keep happy. That gets them into the field and keeps them at their posts for a longer period of time. This has to be an improvement.

Q: How did you find morale both in Colombia and Peru?

COLESHILL: In Colombia morale was quite high. In Peru… I'm trying to think back. In Peru the morale was pretty good, too.

Q: Were in both of those posts the officers able to go out and travel around?

COLESHILL: Yes, but more so in Peru than Colombia.

Q: Both places have been plagued by guerilla activity for a long time.

COLESHILL: Indeed, and sure there are places they couldn't go, but they certainly went to the major urban areas. In both places a lot of the people traveled within country as tourists. Certainly if you travel around the country sightseeing, there's no reason why you can't travel around on business.

Q: Where else did you inspect?

COLESHILL: Then after that we went to Argentina and Chile.

Q: Argentina, had you been there before?

COLESHILL: I have, yes, both on business and for personal travel. Argentina had just suffered their economic tsunami, so everything was quite cheap.

Q: Who was ambassador there?

COLESHILL: Lino Gutierrez.

Q: How did you find the management of the place?

COLESHILL: Poor.

Q: What seemed to be the problem?

COLESHILL: The management officer had a different agenda. He was ___.

Q: He was what?

COLESHILL: He was in love.

Q: Just being distracted?

COLESHILL: It wasn't just that he was distracted, but it caused a morale problem within the embassy.

Q: Could you do anything about it?

COLESHILL: Yes, we did.

Q; Is it difficult? If you see a situation like that, it's not criminal. It's not being done well. I would think the government… It's kind of hard to do things to people.

COLESHILL: Well, if you don't follow the rules and you haven't reported your relationship, it makes it very easy, doesn't it?

Q: I guess it does! I've never been in that position. What are you supposed to do?

COLESHILL: If you have a romantic relationship with a foreign national and the regulations are very, precise about whom you have to notify and what the process is. The fact that everybody knew that he was having the affair did not preclude him from having him report it properly.

Q: Without getting too far into this, did he… Was the foreign national he was in love with, was this somebody who had management responsibilities?

COLESHILL: Yes.

Q: Oh!

COLESHILL: Like I said, when you do stupid things you make it easy for people to enforce rules.

Q: Did you get a feeling that the post, the people in the post, were waiting for you to come and break this up?

COLESHILL: Oh, yes!

Q: Were you aware of this? Were others informing you of this?

COLESHILL: We did not know about this before our arrival. But once there, yes, it came up with both Americans and the local staff. And he freely admitted it. It really was distracting because they had just had a position classification survey and many positions had been downgraded. Then there was the question of, "Why was my position

downgraded and not hers?" Well, they all thought they knew why: She was with him, and therefore by definition she was spared being downgraded. There were a lot of hard feelings.

Q: Oh, boy. How did you feel about getting involved in this sort of thing?

COLESHILL: We had to do the necessary because the post wasn't going to get over this, and when the new ambassador arrived it wasn't going to be fair to him either to walk into this really uncomfortable situation. So we had to deal with it. Personally I'd just wondered at the stupidity of some smart people. There was certainly nothing wrong with this man's capabilities, but he was being stupid. He asked me, "Well. Haven't you ever been in love?" A number of times actually! I joined the service as a single woman. I fell in love in the service, yes. Did I do silly things when I was in love? Probably. Did I do stupid things? God I hope not!

Anyway, it is not easy counseling someone on his personal life.

Q: I was wondering. You come in, you're from outside, and we're talking about somebody who's obviously an adult, been around a lot, and say, "Hey, Jack, you're screwing up here sort of literally." It's not taken well.

COLESHILL: No, he didn't take it well. It's hard to do. I think perhaps it's harder for a woman to counsel a man than a man and a woman. I don't know the answer because I've never been counseled. Yet he admitted it. He admitted he was having this relationship, and he saw nothing wrong with it. Not that there would have been anything wrong with it had he followed the process. Then the post could have decided how to deal with the supervisory problems it created and chain of command problems.

For the deputy chief of mission to say, "Oh, that's all right. I'll just take her out of his food chain, so to speak, and I'll supervise her." How can you just walk one person out of the management team and say, "But this person reports to the deputy chief of mission." How does he know and understand what her work requirements and what performance level? They were trying to circle the wagons because they said, "Oh, yeah! Of course we knew. Of course we dealt with the supervisory issues." "Then show us the memo where he reported it and show us how you solved the supervisory problem." Of course none of that had happened. Then they tried to backdate some memo which, of course, on the computer you can see when it was drafted! Did these people think we're stupid?

Q: Did the Department follow through on this without a lot of trouble?

COLESHILL: I have no idea. It was done very quietly between the team leader, the regional bureau and the incoming ambassador. You won't find it in the unclassified portion of the inspection report. But I heard he left post before the new ambassador arrived. I don't know what happened to him or his career.

Q: From all accounts, I think Argentina is really a beautiful place. Was morale good there?

COLESHILL: Nope, for the reason I mentioned. And the position downgrades. Often one thinks that only effects the local staff, but it takes inordinate amount of time for both the human resources officer and the supervisors of the downgraded staff members.

Q: After this, you went to Chile.

COLESHILL: To Chile. Santiago.

Q: How were things in Chile?

COLESHILL: It was bad.

Q: Oh my God.

COLESHILL: But for different reasons.

Q: What were those reasons?

COLESHILL: We had a deputy chief of mission who micromanaged everything.

Q: it's usually the reverse. The DCM doesn't do much.

COLESHILL: This was absolutely the exact opposite. He micromanaged everything, and presumably with the ambassador's concurrence.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

COLESHILL: Craig Kelley.

Q: How did you handle the micromanagement problem?

COLESHILL: I did not. That was the team leader's front office issue. Each inspector was reporting to the team leader our findings in our section. The common theme was bitter complaints about the micromanagement. She heard it from everybody, so the team leader dealt with it.

Q: Sort of get a feel for this. Your inspection team, you go to a post. Are people ready to unburden themselves or do you have to ferret it out, or how does it work?

COLESHILL: Both. You will have people just waiting to unload. That was usually the Americans. However, the inspection team has to get corroboration so that we do not become pawns in a personal dispute or vendetta. We need proof of wrong-doing.

If the management officer were to say to me, "Our budget and fiscal officer has his hand in the till," I would need proof of the action. At the same time, I could never identify the person who made the accusation. In this example, if I found anomalies, or received more accusations with examples, we would have an auditor come to post. It's harder to deal with things like: "She doesn't treat me with respect," and "He's prejudiced against women." Those are much harder things to figure out whether there is indeed a trend.

The local staff, , don't come to you immediately. They wait and see if they sense the team member is an honest broker. Their fear is that their comments will be reported to their supervisor. The inspection guidelines strictly prohibit this, but I understand their reticence.

Q: One of the things I was thinking, you were going down here as the last American. Were you finding the role of women as foreign service nationals, were they being accorded, you might say more responsibility and deserve responsibility, or were they still being treated kind of the way I would suspect that the Latin American men were treating women? You'd be particularly sensitive to this point I would think.

COLESHILL: The middle and senior level local staff were performing their responsibilities at their level. I don't believe American officers were treating any of their female staff disrespectfully. Some of their foreign national male counterparts certainly looked down on them and treated them disrespectfully.

No one complained to me about it. I think some of it is a cultural thing. They know the environment. They also handle their male counterparts in a ways that an American woman probably would not. They would say or do something flirty.

Q: They were basically ___ romantic in those situations.

COLESHILL: They were managing their situation with their male counterparts. I don't think many of them had any serious troubles with Americans because American men are used to working with women. We're just not used to working with a woman wearing a three-piece business suit and still looking like a hooker. That's a little hard for any American! They wear a colorful bra, put a jacket over it but not necessarily button the jacket!

[laughter]

Q: Oh, gosh.

COLESHILL: That was more in Argentina, Brazil and Colombia. You didn't see that at all in Chile.

Q: Did you get up to Bolivia, too?

COLESHILL: No. Those were my four overseas inspections. Then I spent seven or eight weeks inspecting the global finance center in Charleston, South Carolina. They had just moved from Washington to Charleston.

Q: Why was there that move?

COLESHILL: Space I would imagine. There used to be regional finance centers in Paris, Bangkok, and I believe Mexico. Each of those finance centers had their own computer software. I believe Mexico was the first to close and I don't remember why or when. After consolidation, State assumed responsibility for payrolling and processing payments for U.S. Information Agency and, presumably, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Then they consolidated all of the financial centers to be a global financial center. I think it's now called the finance service center. There probably wasn't sufficient space, or perhaps affordable space, in the D.C. area. The finance service center is in an old navy base, co-located with the passport office.

Q: How did you feel about the situation being somewhat or considerably removed from the daily operations center of the State Department?

COLESHILL: I don't think that mattered at all because the daily operations of the State Department have very little impact on how the bills are paid or even the accounting. They could be on the moon, as long as there are good computer connections.

Q: Were you able to get into any of the operations? One thing, I served for two and a half years in Saudi Arabia next to Aramco, and Aramco would say, "Okay, you get home leave or something, it costs. We figure it costs so much here. Here's a check for this." How you get there, that's your problem. We don't need travel vouchers or anything else. Here's the money. You want to go first class, third class, do how you want." We have all these travel vouchers. An awful lot of paper. Were we thinking of doing something about this?

COLESHILL: That was not our remit. Our remit was to see how they were processing the papers. Were they doing it in a timely fashion? Were they being responsive? Did they work within the established rules and regulations? Did the global finance center meet the global mandate, whether the requirements came from an area with little or no banking infrastructure or had no local mail service. Would they be taken care of?

The British diplomatic service did the same as Aramco, and for everything. Walter retired as we were leaving Nairobi. The British government gave him a check for the equivalent of two business class tickets from Nairobi to London. The end. The same was true of his representation allowance. At his grade, position, and duty station he got a certain amount. That came in an allowance. He did not have to account for every grain of salt as we do in the American service.

Q: After finishing Charleston what did you do?

COLESHILL: I retired.

Q: What did you think about the inspection system after you were working it?

COLESHILL: I had been inspected in a number of posts, so then seeing it from the other side was kind of interesting.

I think inspections are necessary. I think that the down side to when I was an inspector, the inspector general did not want to hear any bad news. He didn't want pages upon pages of reports or pages of recommendations. He was a friend of George Bush, so he wanted to make sure that State Department and the embassies looked like they were clean and efficient. He was very happy to hear that the ambassador, for example, would be shipping home case lots of wine from some wine-producing country in some nefarious way. Our team leader had to handle some issues very quietly and discreetly.

During my time as a management inspector the emphasis was much more a management consultancy, operational improvement, a review of the embassy's processes. If something wasn't quite right, can we fix it while we're at posts? When I was being inspected, the inspectors were really looking for what we were doing wrong.

Q: There's always been this dual perception of inspections. For a long time the inspectors were seen as people who had come to help. In other words, "We're having problems here or there," and the other one is, and this came up in the '80s came up, but they were ___ gotcha experts out to try to find something wrong. How did this attitude, whatever, how did you find this?

COLESHILL: We were not to be your "gotcha." The inspector general definitely was not interested in that. And he also wasn't interested in management. After a while you think, "What's my role here?" He said over and over, "I don't want to see these pages upon pages of management recommendations." There were formal recommendations that the post had to address through a very formal process and timeline. Informal recommendations could be ignored with regional bureau concurrence without further notification to the inspection office.

Perhaps the inspector general's reluctance to have anything substantive in the inspection reports was that they are now in the public domain, so in a small way I could understand what he was saying. But an inspection is an expensive proposition. Yes, we were supposed to be there to help them, but also ensure they were in compliance. There are rules that are just rules, and then there're laws, and you have to comply with statutory regulations because they're backed by laws.

Q: You retired at that point.

COLESHILL: I retired.

Q: Where did you retire? Where are we talking to you now?

COLESHILL: North Carolina.

Q: Why North Carolina?

COLESHILL: Because I don't have to pay state tax on my pension.

Q: Aha!

COLESHILL: That was not the only reason. We live in the Research Triangle, just south of Chapel Hill with wonderful cultural activities : the North Carolina symphony, Playmakers, one of America's leading theater companies embedded in the University of North Carolina, Jazz festivals (Branford Marsalis lives in Durham), the Carolina Ballet, just to name a few. There are lots of activities associated with both Duke University and the University of North Carolina. The area has great medical facilities. There are jobs here. We have a lot of researchers, doctors, nurses and engineers. It's a big white-collar employment center and a big retiree center. People come here because this is about as far south as you're going to get and still have winter, but winter doesn't kill you.

Q: Well, you sold me!

[laughter]

COLESHILL: And you get a lot of house for the money. We pay less in property tax here on a much larger house than we did in Virginia.

Q: Oh, boy!

COLESHILL: When we sold our 1600 square foot townhouse in Virginia we were still able to put money in the bank after we bought this one on an acre of wooded land. So, economics…..

Q: What makes very good sense. Economics and cultural connections.

COLESHILL: And the university. We take classes at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at either Duke or UNC. We have access to the UNC library. The only thing the area doesn't have is the Smithsonian.

Q: That's so hard even if you live in the area to go to the Smithsonian all the time.

COLESHILL: We seem to have. That's the one thing we still talk about. We miss the Smithsonian. We went there a lot. But we have two big museums here who manage to get wonderful visiting exhibits — Monet, Rembrandt, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and of course, numerous lesser-known artists and artifacts. It's just not often enough for our taste so we drive to D.C. at least once a year and include a visit to the Smithsonian.

Our other disappointment is that North Carolina, which had gone "blue" in 2008, is now back to being a "red" state.

Q: Oh!

COLESHILL: But we whittle away at that.

Q: Yeah. I was wondering if you ever returned to work?

COLESHILL: Yes, I am on the When-Actually-Employee (WAE) list that enables State Department to re-employ annuitants. I'm on the Near and Middle East Bureau list.

Q: Have you been called back?

COLESHILL: In 2009, I went to Jordan and Syria to do some grants training for the public diplomacy staff. And now in August (2012) I'm going to Doha, Qatar to be the management counselor.

Q: What were you doing in Jordan and Syria?

COLESHILL: I did grants management training for the public diplomacy people.

Q: What does that mean?

COLESHILL: A grant provides financial assistance to foreign institutions or organizations to support initiatives that promote educational and cultural engagement and foster mutual understanding. We, the U.S. government, do not directly receive any goods or services for the grant funds, but we decide how the money is to be used and require full accountability. Grant signing authority rests with the public affairs officer, and then there's usually a local staff member who manages the grants. In Jordan there were two local employees responsible for managing grants. One for Jordan - the other for the embassy in Iraq. Issuing grants, particularly travel-only grants that send people to the United States, is fairly straightforward. Program support grants get complicated. The process of selecting grantees, ensuring the funds are appropriately used and then accounting for the monies spent and how effective the program was is grants management.

Jordan was in the midst of American staffing gaps. The rehired annuitant public affairs officer thought the grants program was not being managed properly. I was asked to come in ahead of the inspectors to train the staff and bring the program into compliance. When the public affairs officer in Syria heard that I was in the area, she asked that I do likewise for them, which I was glad to do. I had been to both Jordan and Syria when I lived in Saudi and enjoyed both countries.

Q: What was the situation? Right now Syria of course is practically in a state of rebellion. What was the situation when you were there?

COLESHILL: The local situation was fine and our bilateral relationship was actually on the uptick. There was no ambassador there, but it looked like the ambassador was going back. The situation was short lived, wasn't it?

Q: Did we have a fairly active grant program with Syria?

COLESHILL: Yes, they had quite a bit of grant money.

Q: You'd be off doing some more. I'll tell you, eventually you'll get a copy of the transcript of our interview. I ask you to edit it, and you can add things that haven't been mentioned. If there are any things that you'd like to mention about WAE type work that you're doing, include it in.

COLESHILL: Okay.

EPILOGUE: In 2012 I went to Doha, Qatar, to fill the vacant management counselor position from July to November. If Stu Kennedy were interviewing me about this assignment, he would have asked me about the ambassador, about what was happening in the country and how I found the post. I shall focus on those three areas. The Ambassador was Susan Ziadeh and the deputy chief of mission was Ian McCary. Both were Arabist career officers with years of experience in the Middle East. I enjoyed working with and for both of them. Although I had never been a management counselor, I stepped into the position relatively easily. I say "relatively" because technological advances changed the Department's communications processes dramatically. Can you imagine my shock and horror when my secretary asked if a particular cable was "ready to go." I replied yes, believing she would send it to the front office for clearance. Within five minutes, it was on my computer screen, time-dated stamped and numbered. She sent it to Washington directly from her desk. That simply would not have been possible during my regular foreign service career.

I arrived in Doha as the end of the fiscal year was nearing, the busiest time for the management team. The holy month of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr fell in August that year. In practical terms that meant that Muslim employees fasted from sunup to sundown and had a shortened workday. As most local employees were not actually Qatari, but rather - third country nationals, I found many foreign national staff members were on leave. Not an easy situation to find oneself.

The Middle East was also in great turmoil during this period. The French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, published provocative cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed. In the United States, Pastor Terry Jones had burned the Quran in April 2012. In September it was reported that he was involved in the promotion of a movie vilifying Islam, *Innocence of Muslims*. Although there were some protests against the French, the largest, and most violent, protests were anti-American in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and of course, Libya, which culminated in the death of Ambassador Christopher Stephens and three other American citizens in Benghazi. Everyone was nervous about

what might happen in Doha. It is a very modern city with a very large contingent of foreign workers, both salaried and laborers. Fortunately the government kept demonstrators away from the U.S. embassy and we were cautiously optimistic that nothing untoward would happen either to any of us personally or to the embassy. But it was a tense several weeks.

So now that I have finally done my stint as management counselor, I have taken myself off the when-actually-employed roles and am enjoying full time retirement.

End of interview