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

GREGORY T. FROST

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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FOREIGN SERVICE POSTS

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 10th of March, 2012, interview with Gregory T. Frost. What does the T stand for?

FROST: Thompson.

Q: Thompson. All right, and do you go by Gregory?

FROST: Gregg.

Q: Uh-huh. Gregg, let's start at the beginning. Where were you born?

FROST: I was born in Washington D.C. in 1951. Both my parents are from Iowa, Decatur County, Iowa, Davis City and Leon areas. They went to business college in northern Missouri, Chillicothe Business College, now defunct. In 1939, my dad decided he was going to D.C. and seek his fortune. He came out and got a job as a GS-4 clerk-typist for the Census Bureau working on the 1940 census. And then he went back to Iowa, got my mother--they were married just after Pearl Harbor December 1941. They lived in D.C. until moving back to Iowa in 1953.

Q: Well, what -- this started in the '40s --

FROST: Yes.

Q: Do you know where the Frost came from? How they got to Iowa, the family, going back some generations?

FROST: Yeah, they're, they're, they're basically -- Frost is English. The other side of his family was Bracewell. There's a place in Yorkshire, England called Bracewell Hall. His grandfather actually emigrated from Britain directly. The Frosts came to Iowa from Licking County, Ohio, in the mid 1800s.

Q: What are they doing in -- what were your grandparents doing on your father's side in Iowa?

FROST: They were farmers. John W. Frost, my, my grandfather owned, I don't know, 80 acres, 120 acres, I'm not sure what. He had a farm. And he was very prosperous apparently in the county, you know, well thought of, sort of pillar of the community so to speak.

Q: What about on your mother's side?

FROST: Thompson was -- that's -- my middle name is Thompson because that was my mother's maiden name.

Q: T-H-O-M-P-S-O-N?

FROST: Right, so that's Welch I believe.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And Foster I think was the other side of that, that coin on her side. And so I think it's that sort of Welsh, they're from Northern Missouri. My grandfather on that side was a rural mail carrier in Davis City, Iowa, a tiny little town. He enlisted in World War I, fought in the Rainbow Division under Pershing.

Q: Oh. Actually MacArthur, I think.

FROST: Yes, but Pershing was the one he really revered, though.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Pershing was his idol, his hero really. And then he just went back to being a rural mail carrier. I think years later he went on disability. He had a blood clot or something at some point.

Q: Your mother went through business college, didn't she?

FROST: Yes.

Q: And is that where your mother and father met?

FROST: Yes, I think it was.

Q: Mm-hmm. All right, well they came to Washington and did they work? Did your mother work too?

FROST: She did. She, she -- I know during the war she worked for a company -- I don't know whether it became Borden's or some conglomerate, but it was called Standard Brands then. I think it was a food company. And she worked -- she was basically a secretary for them. Got an E for effort, you know, because she was a spotter or something, you know, in one of those, one of those volunteer things that they used to do during the war, I guess, planes, you know those big maps or whatever, stuff like that.

Q: Oh yeah, well we had -- you know, I actually -- I'd go back a ways and as a teenager I was an aircraft spotter too.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: And you know, I single handedly kept the enemy from attacking the United States, I'm sure. They didn't dare (laughs).

FROST: They loved Washington during the '40s. It just must have been a fabulous time to be here and to be -- you felt like you were part of something big.

Q: It really, it really was. I mean this is -- I didn't live here, I lived in Annapolis, but you know, this was the center of the universe in a way.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: Well, where'd your family live?

FROST: You know --

Q: I mean housing.

FROST: Here you mean?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Well, first of all, I moved -- my, my parents moved back to Iowa along with me when I was two and a half in 1953. So but they lived -- while they were -- we were -- I'm, I'm told that my first residence was the Francis Scott Key Hotel, because -- down by GW (George Washington University) somewhere down there, because they were building a house in Wheaton or Silver Spring, Maryland and it wasn't ready and I was born and they were -- they lived -- Martha Custis Drive down in Shirlington for a while, kind of in an apartment townhouse-y kind of place down there I guess. And then they moved into the house in Silver Spring after I was born.

Q: And then when you were about two --

FROST: Yeah, my father, my father worked for the Navy Department. I think -- I believe he was a historian, government historian type or something. I don't know, at some point. But he, he got to the -- he was 4-F for the war and they had a special program where for -- he was, like I said he was in the Navy Department as a civilian GS. And all you had to do was survive boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, 100 degree, 100% -- humidity in the summer.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And then they would put you in uniform, make you a Master Sergeant in the Marine Corps and you'd go back to your desk and do your old job.

Q: Right.

FROST: You had to take a pay cut, but that wasn't really the point, and you got the GI Bill when the war was over. And so he went to George Washington. I don't know how he did this, I'm not even sure he had his bachelor's yet, but maybe he was going to school at

night or something before. But he, he got two master's degrees in three years from like '45 to '48 history in, in education. And then he decided that he wanted to -- he -- I think he student taught at McKinley High School in the district. And he decided he was going to go to Iowa and teach school. So he did that. And that's --

Q: Where'd he go?

FROST: He went to a town called Ottumwa, Iowa, which is basically my, I consider my hometown, it's really where I grew up.

Q: OK, let's talk about Ottumwa. How do you spell it, by the way?

FROST: O-double T-U-M-W-A.

Q: Obviously an Indian word.

FROST: Yeah, I think it means Tumbling Waters. There's various --

Q: Oh yeah.

FROST: -- to what it means, Tumbling Water or something like --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But I'm not really, really sure, but.

Q: What was Ottumwa like as you remember it as a kid?

FROST: Well, it was really, it was really a, you know, kind of a slice of Americana. It was -- it had about I think it was 33,000 of the 1960 census. It's now 24, 25. It lost a lot of -- it was kind of a rough town in a way for its size. They called it Little Chicago. It was -- the main industries in the town in the surrounding area, there was a big John Morrell meatpacking plant there.

Q: Oh yeah, that --

FROST: It was home of local number one of the United Packing House Workers. So it kind of had this kind of class struggle kind of English coal pit kind of flavor to it, you know. And then the other --

Q: Meatpackers are not --

FROST: Exactly.

Q: -- modest people.

FROST: And then around the area it was, it was a coal mining area, there wasn't much going on coal mining wise by then, but it was 47 miles away is the town of Lucas, Iowa, which is the hometown of John L. Lewis, who founded the United Mineworkers of America. And that was where he was, that was where he was from. So it was that kind of rough environment. Billy Sunday, you know, who was an Evangelist around the turn of the century.

Q: Oh yes.

FROST: Ballplayer, I think. He supposedly said the worst thing -- "The only difference between hell and Ottumwa, Iowa is, is that Ottumwa, Iowa has a railroad out of town."

Q: (laughs)

FROST: He probably -- that was probably part of his stump speech, he probably said that about every town he went to *(laughs)*. But it was kind of, it was kind of, like I say, it was a little bit of a rough place, but it was a great place to grow up. Looking back I think I was better off growing up there than some urban area.

Q: I'm sure you were. How big was your family?

FROST: Just me, I was an only child.

Q: Well, did you have a house and --

FROST: Yeah, we had a house. It was on a development, I think it was built in 1947 on a cul-de-sac. It was kind of a two-street cul-de-sac with the circle at the end, you know. And it was -- it was then, you know, it was a small house too. It was only two bedrooms. We built on to it eventually and put a deck on the back. But it was not much of a, you know, I think it cost my parents $8400 or something.

Q: Well, also your father had the GI Bill.

FROST: He did, but teaches -- teachers were very poorly paid then.

Q: Oh.

FROST: Yeah, he probably, you know, I think he, I think he started out at 30 -- he taught junior high at $3,200 a year in 1953. That's when he started teaching there. And so my, my mother eventually, she stayed home while I -- until I was five. Then she went to work as a secretary in a bank. So they both worked when I was growing up.

Q: OK, let's talk about being a kid there. What'd you do?

FROST: Oh gee, I -- lots of things. We played army and, you know, a lot of outdoor stuff and had some good friends, a couple of brothers lived down the street and spent all the summers together and vacations and so forth, but just the usual, usual stuff.

Q: Did you get any taste of farm life?

FROST: Not -- I had a -- my father's oldest brother -- I'm not sure that he still farmed then, but he had a -- he lived on a farm, and so we went over there and visited him once in a while. So we used to go out to the pond. One night we did the -- we went frog hunting in the pond, which was quite an experience. And so I could kind of see what it's like, you know, but that -- not a great taste, I would say, you know.

Q: As a kid were you much of a reader?

FROST: Yes, I was. I loved to read.

Q: Do you recall some of the books that particularly sort of come to mind?

FROST: Oh, one of them, I don't know, it just popped into my head. We had the Scholastic books, which were these little paperbacks, you know. And in order to promote reading among the students every few months they would have a book order. And I would order as many as my parents would let me usually, you know. And they were easy reading and they were fun, you know. Some of them were more directly educational than others. There was one called, *Trouble After School*, which is about this kid that kind of started to go down the wrong path. He befriended the kind of what you would call a "hood" back then, leather jacket kind of kid or something. Of course he got a leather jacket too and started hanging out with the wrong crowd. And it wasn't -- I mean nothing really serious, you know. Of course there's some instance I think where they would let a -- they'd let a little alligator loose somewhere and got in trouble. So he, he decided that he was going to, you know, be a good kid again and *(laughs)*.

Q: My --

FROST: Oh, and there was one about -- we talked, we were talking about Finland earlier -- there was one about, supposedly a true story about some kids in Norway that, that, that they had -- I don't know whether it was -- there was a bunch of gold bars that they had, were -- snuck, sneaked past the Nazis by loading up their sleds with the gold bar too and they went down the hill and stole them right out from under their noses.

Q: Yeah. Well, did the -- what sort of schooling was it there?

FROST: Well, there was -- I went to a place called Irving Elementary School, I guess named after Washington Irving, which was built in the 1890's, sort of two-story brick place, very antiquated, wood floors, wooden stairs. And they had one classroom there and you know which they use for special events and like TV stuff and so forth, where they

still had the desks that were on track, you know. You know, those ones where they, where they have, you know, board and they're kind of nailed down and --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and they got kind of the wrought iron framework and --

Q: Oh yes, and you flip the lid up --

FROST: No, those were not flippable. You just had to sort of -- the ones we had were the ones you flipped and your seat was kind of built into the desk.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And you flipped up and your books were in the --

Q: How did you find the teachers?

FROST: Well, they were -- some of them were good. They varied. But they were -- they seemed old, you know, and when I look back on it they probably weren't that old.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But they seemed old. And some of them were stricter than others and, you know. But -- I don't know, I was always kind of -- I, I was a little bit of a rebel I guess in certain ways. I was a good kid, but I, you know, sort of like maybe -- maybe I had a little problem with authority now and then. I don't know, but --

Q: Did you find any courses that you particularly liked? Any that you didn't?

FROST: Well, let's see. I wasn't -- no, I pretty much liked everything, but I, you know, I think say geography, you know, because I just remember we had a, I think fifth grade, the fifth grade textbook was called, Exploring the New World, and it was about the new world and sixth grade was Exploring the Old World and it was about the old world. I just remember reading about London and Paris and France and Britain-- Eurocentric largely, you know, but not completely. But I just, I just had this vague feeling -- I mean I was happy where I was and I didn't hate this town or hate my life or anything, but I just kind of had this vague feeling when I read this it was really real, like I'm -- I'm going to go to some of these places. Didn't really know how or why, but I mean they -- they had a reality for me that I don't think they had to most of the kids, you know. And part of it I think was because I was not from and of that town. I grew, you know, my parents lived in Washington in the '40s and they'd had experiences that a lot of people there hadn't had.

Q: Did your parents have a political bent or not or?

FROST: They were, they were Democrats pretty much. You know, just kind of -- I'm not sure they're -- I got a book of -- I had a book of biographies that had both my grandfathers in it that they were, I think they -- one of them was a Republican I think, I'm not sure. But I don't know, I don't know why, but they were -- yeah, they loved FDR (Franklin D. Roosevelt) I guess --

Q: Well, FDR was --

FROST: My father was in a CCC when he was a kid and --

Q: Civilian Conservation Corps.

FROST: Right, right. And so I think it was just probably a lot -- mainly the influence of Roosevelt, I would guess.

Q: Well, for many people -- my family was affected the same way -- Roosevelt was seen as the person who kept the United States going and survived during the Depression.

FROST: Yeah, I, I remember when Roosevelt died, my mother -- she kept this article, I'll show it to you at some point. The Leon, Iowa, Journal Reporter, her hometown newspaper back in Decatur County, Iowa, she had sent them a little article that she wrote that they published about Roosevelt's funeral and watching the procession from her office window and, you know, everybody was sad and, you know. She was witnessing history, you know, and --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- there was a lot of that during that period.

Q: Well, while you were still in elementary school, was religion important in your family at all?

FROST: Not so much. I joined a -- my, my father was a, you know, a -- I think he was an agnostic for quite a while and in -- he ended up -- my mother had a nervous breakdown when I was a kid and he promised her if she got well, if she did he would, he would be baptized, and he was, and Methodist church and we went to a -- we went -- I attended a Methodist church growing up. My father had been brought up in I think it's called the Church of Christ, it's one of those where you can't dance, can't smoke, can't play cards, can't do anything fun, kind of puritanical, and --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- I think that kind of turned him off organized religion for most of his life probably, you know, doing that.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But I mean I was -- we went to church every Sunday, went to Sunday School, so I was very much sort of mainstream, mainstream Protestant, Methodist type --

Q: When you were sort of in elementary school did the outside world intrude much or was it an Iowa-centric --

FROST: Oh, it's pretty much Iowa-centric thing, but I remember following a -- that was when the space race was going on, of course.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And John Glenn and all the rest of it. And I was a paperboy from when I was -- I think I was the youngest boys supposedly at least in the town, for The Des Moines Register. You know, I had a, just a little two-block route made me $20 a week or something, you know. And I was very young for it. But I remember, you know, you know, going to like, going down to get the papers early in the morning, 5:30 or something to deliver them. And the Bay of Pigs I remember being on the front page then too, you know, in 1961, you know, era. So I was kind of conscious of it, you know, and watched the news on TV, I watched all the space launches, you know. And my parents -- my mother was terribly afraid that one day she had to leave for work and the launch hadn't occurred yet and I was -- I didn't have to be at school yet, so she was afraid to leave me home alone, "What if this thing blows up? He's going to be traumatized, you know."

I said, "Oh Mother," she'd always tell -- and I said, "Oh Mother, you might as well be a Communist, you know," *(laughs).* Since there was kind of that overwhelming Cold War atmosphere going on. I can't remember getting under my desk or any drills or anything like that. We weren't -- I guess we're not strategic enough for anybody to worry about. But it was that atmosphere.

Q: It was the atmosphere, very much the Cold War. Well, high school, where'd you go to high school?

FROST: I went to Ottumwa High School, in Ottumwa, Iowa, which was the high school in the town. It was a rather large school by then, because I guess we were always at the crest of the baby boom, or we were. And I think there were like 1,850 in three grades. It was, it was only ten through twelve then. My graduating class had like between five and six hundred people.

Q: Ooh.

FROST: So it was a good-sized school then.

Q: What courses were you taking?

FROST: Oh, I took -- I took -- back then, of course, it was the Sputnik generation. So if you didn't take science you were marked as a dummy or not a -- at least not a smart kid, you know. So everybody was kind of steered into science and math. And so I took all the hard science and math courses, you know, that sort of, the sort of like college prep kind of stuff, you know. And it wasn't really -- I was good at everything really, except for math. And I just was, you know, math was -- really wasn't my thing. I wasn't terrible, but after a while I realized, by the time I was a junior in high school I was sort of like -- if I studied a lot and worked hard I got a B, if I just kind of goofed off, I did the minimum, I still got a B. So I goofed off and did the minimum. So math was just not something I was obviously going to -- I did, I did, I did the hard math courses all the way through high school, but that brought my grade down, pulled my average down, because after geometry in ninth grade I never got an A. I got a, you know, B as, B as a junior and B as a senior, but A's in everything else. So I liked science, it was fun, you know. We had a good -- we had an AP -- the only AP course we had was English lit.

Q: AP means advanced.

FROST: Advanced Placement, right. So I took the advanced placement exam in English lit. We had a fantastic English lit, fantastic teacher for that.

Q: Who was that?

FROST: Guy named Bob Thomas. He was known as RT for Robert Thomas because he had a little belt with his initials RT. So he was always known as RT to his students. And I think he kind of, he kind of took his shtick from Johnny Carson. He was really quite a, quite a performer in the classroom and very fondly remembered. My dad was teaching in the high school and he'd moved up there from -- so he was, he was always around. I -- we'd drive to school together when I was in high school, and I even ended up being in his class as a senior, senior social studies. I think it was called "modern problems" or something. It was kind of a practical course. It was a team, so it wasn't just him. So I didn't, you know, I was able to be in his class and it wasn't a problem, if you know what I mean.

Q: With this, did you have any specialty while you were in high school?

FROST: Well, I played the cello. I -- they had a pretty strong instrumental music program in the town and they'd start people out. They had these things called tonettes. I don't know what they are, but they're kind of like an ocarina or a little bit like a recorder but they're plastic and they come in bright colors.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, and you finger them like this, you know. So the fourth graders would start out on these things and they would, they would teach -- some victim of a teacher in each elementary school got stuck teaching us to play these tonettes. And it was like, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," or "Mary Had a Little Lamb," and these kind of little

tunes. And then, and then they had at the, at the -- in the spring they had something called the All-City Music Festival, and all the fourth-graders in the town would assemble on the bleachers in the gym at the junior high. And they, they had to -- and so they played their -- they all played their little songs on the different colored tonettes. The thing was that people -- kids would -- during the concert you would hear these, you would hear these, these sounds, which was the sound of a tonette being dropped by a student and hitting the gym floor underneath the bleachers, some -- many of whom was before they had played they had lost their instrument.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And you just heard, you'd just hear a little, a little crack, the noise as -- there goes another one, you know. But so I -- and then they would try -- they would assign people -- they would decide on instruments during that summer of your fourth-grade year and they had a summer music program to get you started, you know. And cello, I was -- supposedly I had some talent and the cello was a hard instrument, so I did the cello. So I was in the orchestra up through my senior year, I was in the chorus off and on. And I played on the tennis team. I loved basketball, but I was no good. So I could never make the team, so --

Q: Well, I imagine, particularly Midwestern high school, that basketball was pretty good.

FROST: Yeah. Well, yeah, it was, it was, it was -- it wasn't bad. They had a nice little league with some towns of Southeastern Iowa. And but I, I took up tennis in, you know, I lived on the tennis courts when I was -- between the ages of about say, you know, 13, 18. I was, I was -- 14, 18 I guess pretty much. I was -- so I, I, I played three years in tennis, I was number three man in the team, and it was a good thing for me to be able to be in a sport like that.

Q: What about for dating and the movies and --

FROST: I was pretty much of a nerd. I don't know, I didn't really date.

Q: Yeah. Well then, were you pointed towards a college or university?

FROST: Well, I -- they had -- they had a -- as small as this town was, not that it was tiny, but they had, there was a Harvard Club of Southeastern Iowa, and they gave away the Harvard Prize Book Award. It was supposed to be the outstanding junior boy as chosen by the faculty. So there was a guy at -- he's actually on the team tennis team. He wasn't as good as I was, but he was a quarterback on the football team, sort of all-American boy, preacher's kid. Well, he -- I, I -- he didn't get the award, I got the award. You know, I was kind of surprised. I don't think -- I don't know whether anybody else was surprised. And so, so I thought gee, you know, the Harvard Book Award. I, I mean, "I'll apply to Harvard and they'll *have* to let me in, don't they. How can I not get in? You know, I mean why would they give me this award if I wasn't good enough for them, you know?" And so then I, I applied to Harvard. And then this kid I was, that I was, that, that I guess

you could say I beat out the award, he decided he was going to apply to Harvard too. And it wasn't -- he wasn't like he was going to go there. He ended up going to Cornell of Iowa, I know you've heard there's a Cornell College in Iowa. And it's, it's just a small liberal arts college, and it's another, another one of many. And -- but he -- so he applied and his, his dad, preacher was, you know, kind of, kind of brownnosed with the head of the Harvard Club in, in politic and things like that. I know they were -- our applications were probably side-by-side. I mean two kids come from Iowa and they're not going to let both of us in, you know, and guess who got in? Him. And I was crushed at the time, you know, I was absolutely devastated. I applied to Stanford, didn't get in there. And I was actually crushed by the Harvard thing, because when I got the envelope from them I didn't get the thick envelope or the thin envelope, I got the empty envelope. Because it turns out, the radical students had taken over the -- taken over the administration building and they were playing games with the, with the notifications for --

Q: Huh.

FROST: So basically the, the empty envelope was, was what I got. So my mom had to call and find out that no, I was not accepted. So I, I was, I mean I was devastated. And like I said, didn't get into Stanford. I got into, I got into Grinnell, which was my safety school, which is a respected liberal arts college that everyone's heard of it, you know. "Harvard of the Midwest" kind of place. But you know, it was 60 miles from my hometown, you know, we, I used to play, we used to play tennis against their high school team and it was sort of like Grinnell, I mean what a, what a disappointment. I mean Harvard and Stanford, it seems like a step down from -- so I was just, you know, so I was sort of without enthusiasm for it. And that was when they had a glut of students and they didn't, you know, even though I -- they admitted me to their honors program, but I mean no money at all. I mean it was practically as expensive as Harvard was, even then, you know, $3500. Sounds like a lot of money, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so I just sort of thought, "Well, why should my parents pay all this money for me to go to this place I really don't want to go to and I don't know." And then I got a letter from the University of Kansas in Lawrence inviting me to, you know, to apply there and saying you'll be in our honor's program and blah, blah, blah. I said, "God, there's a school that really wants me, you know," and -- because it was, it was, like I say, it was, it was, it was a seller's market back then, you know. And so my mother took me down and it's a beautiful campus in Lawrence, I don't know if you've ever been there. But it's, it's on some, some rolling hills and all the azaleas and the dogwoods and stuff were in bloom and it's like April, you know. I just fell in love with the place, and so I went there. And then that's, that's -- it was a good decision and --

Q: You were there from when to when?

FROST: From 1969 to 1973. Graduated from high school in '69 and from Kansas in '73.

Q: OK. We're talking about the end of the '60s and many of the places, the Stanfords, the Harvards, the universities in California, these were aflame practically. But how about in the Midwest? Did this --

FROST: Well, University of Kansas was, was known as the, the most radical university between Chicago and Berkeley. It was, it was really quite a happening place. You know, the town of Lawrence was, was, you know, they had the whole thing Bleeding Kansas and the slave --

Q: Oh yeah, well this was when Quantrill --

FROST: And Quantrill, yeah. And you know, it was founded by a bunch of, a bunch of liberals from Massachusetts.

Q: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

FROST: You know? Lawrence, I think Lawrence, Mass -- named after Massachusetts, I think, you know. And so, and so that kind of -- even though it was a state university in a, in a, you know, in a Midwestern state, it had a very progressive kind of aura about it, you know. And when I was, when I was a freshman when they had the -- I was a freshman when -- our freshman year was Kent State and all of that and, and the fall of my freshman year was the Vietnam, the famous moratorium, when they marched on Washington in the fall of '69. And I guess spring of '70 was when the Kent State thing happened. Oh, and they had riots because there was kind of a, it was a -- for a town its size had a strong black population there. And so there was kind of, some of that kind of aura. That was really not part of the university quite, but it was going on in the town. And they -- it was -- they burned down the student -- not burned down, but they had a serious fire. Someone torched the student union, did significant damage to it. And apparently the story was that they were radical agitators from the outside and they knew who did it, they were sure they knew who was responsible for this. They couldn't prove it and they couldn't have -- nobody was ever charged, you know, nothing ever happened, but for the union to burn like that, I mean it was, it was shocking, you know. And then in the spring there was a curfew because there was -- the blacks were rioting in the town. And of course they were kind of set off because there was -- after Kent -- around the time of Kent State there was also Jackson State.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And that was a black college in Mississippi. And that -- and so it was kind of a, a scary time. And the Kent State thing hit just towards, you know, when it was about time for finals and graduation and stuff. And so they had, they had a chancellor, a liberal chancellor, Larry Chalmers who later -- he left I think before, before I graduated and became President of the Art Institute of Chicago. And so they had something called the "day alternatives" and they had no class that day. And everybody was asked to assemble, the students to assemble in the football stadium. And I don't know whether there was a vote, I can't remember. But anyway, what happened is there was a whole -- they had

many options as to whether you could take, take the grade you want and not go to class, that you had already, or you could take all your classes pass/fail, or either any of your classes pass/fail, or you could attend teach-ins instead of going to class. And there was all this kind of, you know, because they didn't want the -- they didn't want to send everybody home because it just too -- the atmosphere was too incendiary, you know. And so they, they kind of thought well, let's just kind of -- and so everybody got a 4.0 that semester, you know, because if you were not doing so well in that class you'd just say oh, just convert it to pass/fail, or if you had a good grade I'll take it, I'll just take the A now and not take the final and -- so it was kind of, you know, that was -- and of course the next year, you know, that, that wave kind of passed, you know. And that was kind of the apex of all this, I guess.

Q: Well, how did you feel about this, I mean particularly being a freshman and all, getting into this?

FROST: Well, I don't know. I mean it was, it was, it was fascinating, you know, in -- I mean I was just kind of, I was just kind of twixt and between. I was still kind of nerd, but you know. So I was just, it was, I was never really worried about it. But it was, it was, it was an interesting time to be there.

Q: Mm-hmm. Well, you mentioned the blacks rioting. Was the Civil Rights Movement involved in the insurgences on the campus, or was this just an offshoot of what was happening in the town of Lawrence?

FROST: I think it was more an offshoot of what was happening in the town, yeah, uh-huh.

Q: How did you feel the faculty performed?

FROST: I should go back and say I do remember going to the -- my Methodist church one time, some Sunday evening program they had where they had some people that were freedom writers, you know, we all stood in the circle and sang "We Shall Overcome" --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and they probably took up an offering and stuff like that. You know, that was six or eight years before obviously during the '60s.

Q: Well, did you feel that sometimes the faculty was on one side or the other? Did you have any feel for the faculty at the school?

FROST: I think they were uniformly liberal, at least that's pretty much my, my take on it. They had Kansas State, which was the land-grant college, the agricultural engineering type place in Manhattan west of there, you know. And they were -- Nixon spoke there.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And there was a whole different atmosphere on that campus.

Q: I'm sure there was, I mean --

FROST: It was known as Nixon's favorite *high school*.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, you know, they were our big rivals of course, you know. And at the football games, we would shout -- they would shout at us, "Kill Snob Hill," because our university was known as the Hill because it was on a hill, you know, so we'd always call it the Hill. So "Kill Snob Hill," and we would yell back at them, "Wreck Silo Tech," *(laughs).* So but it was, it was really a liberal bastion, you know, this, this --

Q: Well, how did you adjust to college academics?

FROST: Well, I don't know. It, it -- we didn't really work that hard, you know, I goofed off a lot, and -- but I, I did well. It didn't seem to be like a big, you know, I was, I was prepared for it I guess, well enough.

Q: Did you get involved in any extracurricular business?

FROST: Almost none. I really didn't. I just goofed around with friends and -- I ended up falling in by accident through a couple of acquaintances I'd made with a whole group of people from Lawrence, Kansas that were from the town that had graduated from Lawrence High School, some of their dads were professors. But I was kind of an honorary member of this group, you know, that -- these kids had known each other in high school, spent a lot of time with some of them, you know, while I was there.

Q: What was the social life like?

FROST: Oh, it was an 18-state for 3.2 beer. So there were -- the town was fill of student bars. And so, like I say, I didn't really -- I was -- we were -- my group and I were kind of antisocial, so we didn't really do a lot of social life, but usually, you know, go out to the bars and we, we liked to play pinball. So we'd play pinball at the bars and drink beer and, and that sort of thing.

Q: Well, I'm sure that your pinball activities really paid off later when you got into the Foreign Service.

FROST: When we were students in France it was like heaven *(laughs).* I did a year abroad, I should tell you.

Q: OK, where'd you go?

FROST: Well, I went to -- thing is that I started off in -- I -- there was a language requirement in Kansas, which there was more -- I think it's less now in most places, but in those days it was a, it was two full years, you know, two full semesters and like 101, 102 and then, you know, 201 or 202 kind of stuff, you know. And so I thought oh, well I -- I'd taken a little bit of Spanish in, in, in a sixth grade TV Spanish course that the local school system had. And then I took seventh and eighth grade Spanish, which was -- and then Latin in ninth grade, because everybody took Latin, you know. And then I, then I -- and so I, I thought well, I'm just, I'm just, I'm just going to start as a freshman and study French and that'll be my language, you know, for my requirement. So I did French one and two. And Kent had a summer language institute for six weeks in Paris at the Sorbonne. It was only our group kind of taught by the teachers there, but it was our, we were all together. So my parents let me finance me to go on that, so I did French three and four there. So I came back and I sort of thought oh, I'm going to take the next course and just kind of continue. And that's when I started thinking about the junior year abroad program, which was, it was actually the University of Colorado's program, but Kansas was one of the other universities that were allowed to feed students into it, in the University of Bordeaux, France. And so I said, yeah, I'll go on that. So I got back and I mean I had a bazillion French credits by then, so surely no points in doing anything else for a major. I'd never really declared one, just kind of drifted along, took the courses I wanted and ones that sounded interesting with no thought to what my future was going to be. And I got back and, "So I guess I'll be a French major." But I was kind of interested in history, so I went down to the history department and said, "Well, I don't really have much -- I can't even take anymore French, but -- when I'm a senior, so what if I, what if I could just like take all these history courses and end up with a double major in French and history?" And the department was insulted that I would even ask that when I was like going into my senior year, you know *(laughs)*. So they just had, they -- I think they were insulted. So I probably could have done that, but you know. So anyway, I, I ended up majoring in French and, and it was interesting to be overseas of course during that time as well.

Q: You spent a year in Bordeaux?

FROST: Right, '71, '72.

Q: What was your impression of Bordeaux at the time?

FROST: Well, I was kind of -- it was a city that had seen its best time come and go in the 18th century. It was not really a sort of place of the future, it was more a place of the history. It was a nice, nice enough, you know, and of course the wine country was good and stuff like that. I had a -- they set me up with a French host family. We all -- I lived, I lived in a room with a house with just a bunch of random students. We each had our own room and, and -- and had one of those Mobylette moped things, which my parents gave me money to buy. So that was nice. I had my own independent transport, which most of the kids didn't have, which was a good thing. And so I got set -- I got set up with a host family that I didn't really live with, but they had me out to dinner every Saturday night. And the father and one of the sons played tennis and I had my racket there so we went

and we had an hour or two of indoor tennis every Saturday night followed by dinner. And I still, I'm still, we went, we went -- my wife and I went to see them last May and the parents are now in their eighties. Stayed with the brother, my French brother that was my age in -- private in Bordeaux, so it was, it was a great experience.

Q: You were there when?

FROST: '71, '72.

Q: Was there any would you call a residue from the events of '68 or?

FROST: Well, the university was, was, had kind of opened up, you know, and the elitism was kind of fading a little bit. But not a whole lot at that point. It, it, it was, it was pretty common. Of course Bordeaux was a pretty bourgeois type city. It wasn't Paris, you know. And -- but of course Vietnam was going on then still and --

Q: Did you have a problem either defending Vietnam or was Vietnam hovering for you as far as the draft goes?

FROST: Well, I had a student deferment. And then when I got back that was, that was -- just had one year to go, '72, '73, my senior year. And it was, it was pretty obvious that the _____ were plummeting and they had a lottery by then. And I had a high number that virtually guaranteed that, you know, that I wouldn't be called. So I just exposed myself to it and was not called, you know, so that was kind of the end of that. So it was never really, never really much in my mind, you know. I just reported to the draft board like I was supposed to and took my student deferment every year and didn't worry about it.

Q: Well here you were, you'd been to France, had the Foreign Service crossed your radar at all?

FROST: No. No, I had no idea what I was going to do. And -- but I got a -- I got an offer for a -- to a sort of French professor's old boy network kind of deal. I got an offer of a teaching assistantship for my master's in French at Washington University in St. Louis. And sight unseen, you know, they were just -- I guess a professor from there called up his buddy at KU (Kansas University) and said, "Can you send me some candidates for TA's (teaching assistant), you know, we need TA finders for next year."

So I thought, "Well gee, they'll pay me free tuition for a master's that doesn't require a thesis, two years, free tuition and $2500 a year," which was real money back in 1973, you know. So I thought I'll do that. And so that was -- as to what I was going to do after that, I didn't really think about it, you know.

And -- but thing is I got -- how I got interested in the Foreign Service is kind of a roundabout story, but anyway, let me tell it. The lady who's now my wife at the time, she had -- her sister's husband was, you know, in his twenties, they were both in their

twenties, taught high school with my dad. Or he was -- started off as an intern there. And so, so, so, and, and so her sister then lived in, in my hometown. And, and she was going to Central College in Iowa, which is in Pella, Iowa, which is a Dutch town not -- about 45 miles from Ottumwa. The, the -- my, my, my now wife and her sister had gone there as well. And they have a very strong French program in Paris and it turned out that, that -- and I'd met, I'd met her at some point when she was visiting her sister there, you know, and we maybe went out on a date or something once or I don't know, twice, you know. But so I knew her. And then, and then -- so my moth -- when I was -- I was leaving, I was leaving France to come back when she was go -- arriving, in the summer of' 72. And we -- I traveled with a bunch of my friends for a few weeks around Europe before I went home, you know, did the grand tour kind of stuff, you know, Italy and what have you. And so my mother sends me this letter and sends, "Oh, Sue Hudson is going to be in -- you know, she's starting in Paris and she's arriving. You know, here's her address, you know, you should look her up." And that's the kind of stuff you never do is look up people who your mother wants to set you up with.

Q: Of course not.

FROST: But I did! You know. And, and so I went -- we went out in Paris and I impressed her with my worldly ways that I could, you know, bone my trout --

Q: (laughs)

FROST: Went out for a picnic somewhere in Bologna and you know, that kind of thing. So we kind of developed an attraction, you know, I guess and you could say. So then but I had to go home and she was staying. So we corresponded during that year a little bit off and on, you know. And, and then when, when in, in the fall when I was -- when -- after I'd been accepted to Washington University I get this tenth letter from her and said, "Oh, I -- it turns out I graduate in three years -- I, you know, graduate Schererville, I've got so many credits and my dad says he'll, you know, he won't pay for me to go back there and just play with my friends for my senior year because I don't need to go, you know, I've already got all the credits I needed. But he will pay for me to go to grad school if I want to go to grad school. What about French grad schools? What do you know about that?"

And I said, "Well, I got into Washington University, sight unseen, and you know, I think your -- at least your oral French is a lot better than mine and you know, and so I mean why don't you just see if you can, you can go there, you know? And that's, you know," and so she called up the chairman of the department, talked to them, and he said yeah, come on out and we'll get you into a special student and if things work out we can, you know, you can be a regular master's degree student, come second semester.

And so I didn't even know this, because you know, communication is not what it is now.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So I just sent her this letter and said, you know, didn't really think much about it. And then I was sitting there in the first graduate class that I had, and she walks in. You know, I had no idea she was *(laughs)*, was even going to go there. So we were kind of together after that and we were sitting around -- they wanted me to go -- they were encouraging me to go for my PhD and I was thinking, "Gee, I don't know, be a professor, I don't know about this," you know. And so I was sitting around her apartment where I basically -- you know, even though I had a dorm room I basically lived at her apartment for most of the time. And our first 20-page paper was due, you know, for our grad classes in French and I said, "Well, gee, I, you know, I don't know, I can't stand this. You know, this isn't fun, you know. I wonder what else I can do with my life."

And she happened to have the application for the Foreign Service exam, you know -- the booklet with the application and everything. And she was under the impression -- she was under 20 and she thought you had to be 20 -- she wasn't going to take it because she thought she had to be 21. Turns out if you read the fine print it says, "If you're, if you're, if you have a BA you can -- you don't have to be 21." But she thought she had to be 21, so she wasn't -- she didn't discounted she was going to take it.

So, so, "Why don't you fill this out? Go down to the Federal Building on a Saturday in December," you know, which, which was '73, "and take this Foreign Service exam." You know, so I took it, passed the oral, or passed the written and then got invited for the oral, which I did in Kansas City that next year and passed that, did --

Q: Do you recall any of the question asked on the oral exam?

FROST: I do, yeah. They, they had, you know, it was a three -- it was a panel of three and, you know, it was kind of like there was, there was, there was the friendly guy, the neutral guy, the hostile guy, they each had a role to play, and that's the way they came off. You know, one was kind of really nice and one was kind of nasty, and the other one was kind of just straightforward, you know, and kind of see how you react to each other I guess. And I remember one question they asked was, "What would you -- where would you take -- if you had an International Visitor, you were in New York and were going to take him out on the town, you know, what, what cultural event or something, what would you take him to?"

And I said, "Well, I would take them to a Broadway musical, because what could be more American than that, you know?" Of course that was back in the days when Broadway musicals were "Oklahoma" and "South Pacific" and stuff like that. Anyway, so that's what I said, you know, and they would always twist a thing. It was sort of like -- I remember one question. It was some controversial visa case, you know. They'd always kind of turn the screw just to up the pressure on you. It's sort of like he felt like he'd ask a question about this difficult visa case and then he'd say, "Well, what if the ambassador gets involved?"

You know, and I said, "If I thought I was right, you know, and following the law I'd stick to my decision." So I guess that was the, that was the -- I also remember a question from

the written back then, which I've laughed and joked about since then. It was sort of like, "You, you, you go out to the airport to pick up the pouch and it comes in and you're picking it up and going -- when you walk through customs and they demand to search, open it and search it, what would you do?" And there was -- obviously the wrong answer was, you know, something like go back and tell the boss, whatever.

But the one question was -- the last answer was, "Grab the pouch and drive straight to the embassy." Yeah, I thought, and get shot in the back or something.

I thought, "Well, thought ought to be a question that's sort of like if you get that one wrong they ought to fail you for that alone."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Because that means you're not -- you don't have the, the, the, the temperament of a diplomat, if that's your answer *(laughs).*

Q: I --

FROST: I just barely passed, so I was --

Q: Well, most people did. I used to -- around that time, a little later, '75 or '75 I was on the board of examiners. I mean I was an examiner. And the average person, we used to -- we had a problem because 70 was passing.

FROST: That's what I got.

Q: And we very seldom got above 75. I mean they kept saying, "Be more literal in your," because always just couldn't do it. I mean, you know, we were --

FROST: Well, I had not even taken an international -- one international relations course when I was in college. And so I looked at, I looked at the booklet and thought, "Well, the object of this exercise is to get hired. So what am I going to be most competitive in? What do I have the best chance in?" So I look at the little things about the cones, you know, and so I thought, "Well, OK, there's admin. That kind of looks like a business type of person." And I hadn't taken any business courses either.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And I thought, "So political, well, you know, I like international relations, you know, sort of, but I haven't taking any courses or anything. And that looks like it's probably going to be the toughest, most competitive one, you know. So that would, that would, that would be -- I think I would do well at it, but I don't think I'd probably be -- there'd probably be a lot better people." Econ, I hadn't take any econ courses, so that was out, you know. Obviously I'm not an economist. And then there's consular, "Well, that

looks like just kind of a common sense thing, you know, reasoning and, you know," and back then not every -- not every other person, applicant went to law school, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: People did go to law school, but not like *everyone*, like it seems to be now. So there were -- "Well, lawyers probably have the edge, but how many of them can there be? But by and large it's a problem-solving thing, you know? And I think I'm probably -- I'm pretty good at that kind of stuff, you know. And plus, it's kind of helping people and it's kind of, there's a kind of social work aspect about it as far as the American Citizen Services things, you know." And when you're kind of nervous about working for the government anyway because you've just come out of Vietnam and, and Watergate and all that, you know, you're not so sure about whether I don't want to work for the government, you've heard all this propaganda about it, you know. "Well, I mean that's a kind of, that's a good guy kind of thing. So how about consular?" So that's -- you had to choose your cone before you read the exam at that point.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So --

Q: Well no, I mean you made very good sense. When I gave the exam we didn't have that, that outfit, either as USIA (United States Information Agency), but other than that it was rather straightforward. Although we would kind of think somebody would --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- fit into one thing or another.

FROST: Yeah, *uh-huh. And of course that was -- I mean I don't know whether that's a good way to choose it or not, but you know.*

Q: Well, had you done much reading about foreign policy?

FROST: Very little, very little.

Q: Outside of France did you have any place you'd like to go?

FROST: No, I was kind of open to -- I was, you know, excited at the prospect of being able to go just about anywhere, but I didn't really -- no, I hadn't really -- there wasn't really anything else.

Q: Would you talk just a bit about Washington University? And the reason I ask, I have a daughter who's finishing her freshman year there.

FROST: Oh really?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Well, you know, it's kind of funny, being a grad student is a lot different from being an undergrad. You're not really quite part of things in the same way. And we had a couple of classes to teach as teaching assistants every semester which kept us busy, besides our coursework. And I don't know, I just didn't really connect with the place.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: I lived in this dorm, but like I say, because my future wife ended up there, I, I pretty much, you know, spent most of my time at her off-campus apartment. So I had a single room there, I just slept there some of the time, and you know, ate in the cafeteria some of the time. And I don't know, it was, it was largely, it was, it was kind of an East Coast school in a semi-Midwestern setting, if you know what I mean.

Q: Well, that's my understanding. It has very high ratings.

FROST: And you know, it, it -- yeah, exactly! And you know, a lot of the kids, it -- I think it was a, a hot -- I don't know what the figures were, but it seemed like there was a very strong Jewish student population there, mainly from the East Coast --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and New York and places like that. And I remember it was a -- that was the time that the, that the, the 1973 Middle East War was going on. And people were volunteering to go over and --

Q: Yom Kippur War.

FROST: Yeah, Yom Kippur War, yeah, that's what it was. I forgot, forgot the name for a sec. And people were volunteering to go over and serve and, you know, support Israel and all the stuff. And it was a very different atmosphere from KU for me. So I didn't really, you know, I didn't -- I'm not saying I didn't -- I just didn't really bond with the place, if you know what I mean, you know. And I was very cir -- I mean we, we, you know, we -- when you're a grad student you just concentrate on your, your department and your area and stuff like that. And of course being part of a department, you know, was kind of interesting because there were all these rivalries and they're like children these professors sometimes, the way they act, you know, and it's just --

Q: Well, did you, did you --

FROST: -- cliques and --

Q: -- you know, many Foreign Service people when they retire or even before, I mean usually often there are two kind of professions that immediately occur to the type of

person who ends up in the Foreign Service. One, is the Foreign Service and the other is the academic world.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: And so many who've gone into the academic world and then to the Foreign Service and end up being oral historied talk about the problems in the academic world, the rivalries and the battles --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- you know, as Kissinger said, you know, because it's so much effort over so little. But it does seem to be a rather contentious field.

FROST: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And of course there was kind of the, you know, the, you know, the new criticism and textual semiotics and, you know, the idea of great literature, traditional. That was, that was all out, it was all --

Q: It's too white and too male and --

FROST: Yeah, all that. And, and you know, it's just, everything is, everything is white males and it's all, it's biased and blah, blah, blah, and -- but they had this kind of -- in French in particular there was this thing called textual semiotics kind of like --

Q: Oh yeah, the French led that.

FROST: Levi Strauss and all that. And it was kind of -- it was -- and I'd always screwed up on the sort of great literature kind of thing, you know, that's what we were brought up on, you know. That was all, that was all radicalized and changed, you know, at that point. But I remember -- I also remember the students there, I was talking about the student body, and somebody -- there was a big scandal in the big newspaper because somebody was caught stealing the biology 101 exam, you know. And the comment in the student paper was, you know, "This shows all the, all the pressure of getting into grad school and law school and, you know, and med school," in particular because it was bio, you know. I got, I think I got an A in bio – in the one bio course I had to take at KU. I thought, "Well, if people can't get an honest A in biology 101, I don't want them operating on me, you know." Gee, this is, you know. There was kind of a spoiled rich kid aspect too that maybe turned me off. But all my kids were nice, you know, I got -- the kids in my class were, you know, it was fun teaching them stuff. They were smart.

Q: I think the spoiled rich kid thing was -- showed up in particularly in, in the Vietnam War, the draft thing, you know. The people who were the most vocal against the war in Vietnam, as soon as the draft stopped they're interest in the poor Vietnamese ceased almost completely.

FROST: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And that's -- that's, that's, that's really true. The -- once, once they, you know, the draft went by the boards pretty much with the lottery and the lower call, around the time, you know, it would have hit me if it had hit me, you know. And, and once, once people don't have to worry about going to war, you know, not that I worried about it and my friends didn't really worry about it a lot, but people were worried about that, you know. And in a way the whole movement deflated just like a balloon. All the air went out of it. Because I remember when Abby Hoffman -- you remember Abby Hoffman, the radical?

Q: Oh yes.

FROST: Well, he came to Kansas and he spoke in the field house, you know, it's a big basketball school in the field house, legendary, you know, Will Chamberlin and all that. And so he spoke in the -- Abby Hoffman spoke in the field house and I went. And I remember one of the biology professors that I sort of knew with kind of long gray hair was passing around a bucket, chicken bucket for donations and stuff, you know. And that sort of thing. And but Abby Hoffman, you know, of course he had this -- he made this dramatic entrance and he opened his shirt to reveal an American flag shirt. You know, just he was a theatrical showman kind of guy, you know. And he was, he was badmouthing the -- Democrats were the, you know, this -- McGovern and, you know, the Kennedys and stuff, "Teddy from the bridge and George "Muck-Government," and you know, all these, you know, they were seen as, you know, they weren't, they weren't left enough, they weren't -- they weren't socialists and communists, and whatever. And the thing about it is I noticed that it was only when he mentioned the war that he got any applause. I mean, you know, that was, that was all the kids cared about really.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: They didn't care about this, you know, taking over the government and socializing America and all this stuff. That was just not really in anybody's, you know, except for the committed few tiny radicals. Everybody else, I mean they might have been sympathetic towards the actual -- because it was the, the in thing, but they weren't interested. The war was driving it, you know, as far as all the students were concerned in their quest for that.

Q: Did the war come up during your time in the oral history? Did you talk about -- did the examiners ask you about it?

FROST: No, they did not.

Q: Mm-hmm. Well, then were you told at the time that you passed or not?

FROST: Yeah, they, they, they -- you sat, waited in a room, and they called you back in and said, "Congratulations, you passed and you're put on a list and we'll let you know." Of course I was a little bit concerned because that was, that was -- I had a year and -- I had, let's see, I had I guess, that was December of '73, so I had three more semesters of

grad school to go and I had decided that I was just going to chuck the master's if I got the call, but I'd really wanted to kind of, to finish the master's so I'd have it, you know. And it just so happened that I got the call, you know, in April, you know, and, and finished in May and joined in June. So there wasn't -- there wasn't a conflict about it.

Q: What about your girlfriend-to-be-wife?

FROST: Well, she -- basically I proposed to her, we got married in a year after I'd passed the Foreign Service exam, in other words, in the middle of our second year of grad school. And so she was just going to -- she, she became, you know, became a trailing spouse.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: After that. And we had a lot of trouble adjusting to it for a while because, you know, we both had the same educational background.

Q: OK. You went, took -- when did you start your Foreign Service course?

FROST: June of '75. I was -- by the way, our class was the first, the first true post-Vietnam class, because the class before ours was January '75. I'm told that they had students paneled from Vietnam in that class. I don't think any of them went because Saigon fell in April. But they were, they were, they were still on the course to send people to Vietnam in the class before mine. But of course after, after Saigon fell that was out of the question, so --

Q: How many were in your class?

FROST: There was -- we were the 119th class of the old system.

Q: I was in class one, by the way.

FROST: Oh, no kidding. So that was 1940 --

Q: It was 1955.

FROST: 1955, yeah. So it was the 119th class in -- there were, there were 96 people in it, which was I think the biggest one that anybody could remember at that point.

Q: Yeah, certainly.

FROST: The thing is -- and I got a 70, like I said. And I think what -- I think the reason I was hired is because it was the fiscal year, you know, was one July back then. So they, they had money to hire a bunch of people for the last class of the fiscal year and they just, they just hired anybody who was living --

Q: Well, they also -- I averaged into -- my oral -- my written exam, 70 was passing too, and I got something like a 69.87 or something and I was averaged in. It's purely a hurdle, you know.

FROST: Well, thing is that if I had known -- I didn't even know there was such a thing as the Georgetown School of Foreign Service or the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. If I had known I was competing against people like that I might have been intimidated and scared, you know. But I just went down to the Federal Building in St. Louis and wrote the exam -- I was always good at the standardized tests, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so, you know, I was, you know, I -- it was my forte sort of, you know, I loved it, you know, it was fun, you know. My ACT score was the best ever for my high school for quite a while. But I sort of choked on the ACT.

Q: What was the composition of your A100 course?

FROST: You mean in terms of cones or?

Q: Well, more male/female, minorities, where people came from, that type of thing?

FROST: I'd say it was, you know, at least for the time it was pretty diverse. There were a lot of ordinary people in it, you know, and a few sort of what you'd call effete snobs I guess or something, but it was -- I mean I was comfortable enough with it. I didn't feel like I was in, in with a bunch of aliens, you know. Certain people struck me as annoying, you know. I remember when we were introducing ourselves, you know, in the very beginning and, you know, such a large class was a little bit unwieldy, you know, in the old FSI (Foreign Service Institute).

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But I remember we were asked to introduce ourselves in -- some guy just, "Well, I'm finishing up my master's in history at the University of North Carolina with the, you know, did my thesis, emphasis on the English Tudor period," or something like that.

And you sort of think, yeah, who, you know, so what -- and then the next guy stands up and says, "Well, I'm from Wilson Creek, North Carolina. You want to know where that is, it's just a few miles from Pilot Knob. You want to know where Pilot Knob is, well, it's just a few miles from Wilson Creek." And everybody just collapsed in laughter. Now, there's a regular guy, I liked him, you know. There were some older people that are kind of retreads and a lot of other agency -- agriculture and so forth, you know.

Q: How about women?

FROST: There were quite a few. Yeah, I don't know what the percentages were, but there were quite a few.

Q: How did you find the courses there?

FROST: Well, it was kind of a stressful period really. You were trying to get to this -- you're in a new place, in a new career, and so and so forth. It was, it was kind of, you know, the textbook talking head, you know, it wasn't in the forefront of educational methodology and practice, if you know what I mean? It was just kind of old fashioned.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Pretty much talking heads and lectures--

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- you know. Then I did the best Consular course after that, which was not yet called ConGen, because it wasn't that kind of concept. It was just kind of read FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual) and learn about the law and regulations--

Q: FAM meaning the Foreign Affairs Manual.

FROST: Right.

Q: The instruction book.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And fine points of Consular law and, you know, not very practical really, you know.

Q: Did you have any particular place you wanted to go to or not go to?

FROST: I was just kind of open, you know. And so I didn't really, you know, I was just kind of excited about the whole possibility I could end up anywhere. I didn't really -- I really didn't -- you know, you didn't submit a list -- I had a, I had a career -- my, my first career counselor was a fellow named Dan Welter, really nice guy.

Q: I remember Dan.

FROST: He was a Consular cone officer. He was very friendly and, you know, felt like -- you felt like he'd take good care of you whatever happened, you know. And so for some reason I ended up being sent to Liverpool, England. That was my first post. And I

describe it to people as the consulate the way God intended, i.e. (as in) back in the 19th century. You know, it was very small -- three-officer post.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Should have been only two, if -- and it closed while I was there.

Q: Was Nathaniel Hawthorne --

FROST: Yes he was there -- he'd been one of the early Consuls – but he wasn't the first. Because actually it was, I think it was the, the second largest -- second oldest US Consulate in the world—opened in 1790 I believe.

Q: Yeah, and also --

FROST: But he'd been Consul there. The residence was still called Hawthorne House when I was there.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And it was located in the Qunar buildings on the pier head in Liverpool down by the docks or the old docks, you know, which were then pretty much closed in war by then.

Q: It was considered a prime spot because political appointees went there. And Hawthorne got it because he ha written the biographies of Franklin Pierce, I think.

FROST: Uh-huh.

Q: And --

FROST: I guess it was money to be made. You received a commission because you got paid for signing seamen on and off ships and --

Q: Absolutely.

FROST: -- stuff like that, yeah. Uh-huh, yeah. And it was -- and another person who served there was John Stewart Service, who was the, you know, one of the China hands, the famous people that lost China and all that, you know. He was kind of pensioned off there, so to speak kind of, toward the end of his career.

Q: Who's Consul General?

FROST: A fellow named George Peterson. He was a Consular Cone Officer. Again, there was very much -- Consular Officers occupied very much a second-class citizenship in those days.

Q: Oh yeah.

FROST: And you felt that, you know. And, and, and he was, he was a Foreign Service Staff Officer, an FSSO, an FSSO-1, which was equivalent to the old FSO-3. It's, it's the equivalent to the --

Q: Colonel.

FROST: FS-1. Yeah.

Q: At the Colonel level.

FROST: Except for the fact that it was kind of like a Colonel in the Reserve or something because in the, in the -- because he was Principal -- this place was a Consulate General. The Principal Officer normally is entitled to the rank of Consul General. But because he was only a staff officer and not an FSS-er and not an FSO, he could not call himself Consulate General. He was just Consul. It was kind of a class thing or something.

Q: Oh yeah, very, very definitely. Yeah, I know. Because I spent 30 years as a Consular Officer.

FROST: And then I had -- there was a guy named Irwin Ebenau who's the second officer. The thing is what happened is the, I guess the Consul General -- the previous Consul General, who was an FSO and therefore actually called that, was a fellow named Normand Redden. Norm, Normand, Normand like Normandy, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Normand Redden. He apparently got the job as -- he'd gone by the time I got there, but he, he had -- he'd gotten the job as Consul General in London.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so George Peterson was a number two officer. He moved up to number one. And Irwin Ebenau was the number three officer, and he'd moved up to number two. And these are both guys in the '50s and weren't setting the world on fire, you know, my two bosses, you know. And so it was kind of strange, you know, to -- there was a whole generational difference -- I was 25 and they were 24, 25.

Q: Well, what were you doing?

FROST: Well, I was the Visa Officer. You know, there were -- I was the Visa Officer and Erwin was the American Services and Passport Officer and then George was the boss. So I, I, I was responsible for about -- we did about 50,000 visas a year. Brits required visas back then of course, no waivers -- we did about 50,000 nonimmigrant visas a year and

London did half a million. So we did 10% of London's work, so, with just one officer approving them--me. Our district was the entire north of England.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And it wasn't hard, but we had -- didn't have to interview very many people. Most -- most of them were by mail.

Q: Were you doing a lot of -- did you get involved with seamen?

FROST: No, that was kind of a thing of the past. Everyone in A-100, I got a lot of jokes in A-100 and Consular courses about, you know, about sailors in Liverpool and stuff like that, you know. But it was -- because they'd gone to container ships and so that was just --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: That very much put an end to most of that stuff.

Q: What was Liverpool like in those days?

FROST: Well, it was of course, you know, known for the Beatles. And it was a depressed area. It was a very depressed area. It was sad, you know. And it was, it was decaying and, you know, post-industrial, industrial city in a post-industrial world and, you know, shrinking, declining. But it was, it was charming. I mean it was Liverpudlians, most of the best British comedians are from Liverpool and they're just, you know, just great people, you know. It's, it's – I got interested in the soccer team, still a HUGE fan of Liverpool Football Club, even now. We went to some games. My wife likes sports too, so that was great fun.

Q: What kind of living did you have?

FROST: Oh, we had 17-room Georgian mansion.

Q: (laughs) God.

FROST: Yeah, rattling around. It was poorly furnished and needed a lot of renovation because it was a little bit seedy, but that was where George Peterson has previously lived and of course he moved into the Residence and I moved into his house. So it was, it was, it was a kick. I mean it was really kind of -- we, you know, for two people who had been students, you know, a year earlier, it's like gee, this is -- yeah, it was a great house, big brick house and yeah, in a private kind of park, you know, overlooking -- drove down to the end of the street and the street ended, dead-ended at the end and there was the Mersey River right there.

Q: Did --

FROST: Charming place really.

Q: Did you get involved in any protection of welfare work and all?

FROST: Not really, no, I didn't -- I -- I guess I got -- I got to go on one prison visit to Armley Prison in Leeds, Yorkshire. Very old and grim But no, I wasn't really involved in that. I pretty much did the visas.

Q: What about the people there? Did you have much contact with them?

FROST: Mainly -- they had us -- they had a Consular Corps there that was very active, lot of honoraries, you know. And there were the French and I don't know who all else, Germans I think, you know. And so they had a lot -- I was invited on their cocktail circuit, and that was fun. Became -- there was a French Vice Consul and his wife and we became friends with them then. I had, I had a couple of really, of you know, single 30ish British girls working for me, you know, in, in the section and I socialized with them quite a bit, my wife and I. And they, you know, got to know one of their, got to know one of their families and you know, went to their house. They lived on the other side of the river. Some of the staff took the ferry across -- ferry across the Mersey and there's a famous British invasion rock and roll song by that name from the '60s, and they would take a ferryboat to work --

Q: Ah.

FROST: -- from the other side of the river. And so but I, no, I didn't really -- we didn't really get involved community-wise a whole lot I guess, but we were just busy exploring, you know, and having fun.

Q: I suppose basically it was a pretty good place to start out.

FROST: It was, it was. It was low-key, low-pressure. But it was under threat of closure when I got there and there was some doubt right up 'til the last minute whether I was going to end up in London or actually go to Liverpool. And I in fact did a week of kind of training, you know, worked in the Consular Section for a week to get acquainted in London and then went up there. And so it was under threat of closure and it in fact closed nine months after I got there. And that's, that's how I ended up in Nigeria.

Q: What happened? I mean --

FROST: Well, you know, they wanted to, they wanted to ship my, my, my position was being transferred to London. It was kind of, kind of bad vibes about the whole -- the way it went down. The, the locals were just sort of like oh, the Ford plant is, you know, under threat of closure so, you know, why should the Consulate be any different? You know, it was kind of -- they were just kind of, you know, down, you know, they were depressed about -- it was a depressed era, they were depressed, you know what I'm saying?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: It wasn't the usual fight to keep the Consulate or -- oh, well what else is new? What else is closing this week? So it was kind of sad, you know, because the spirit of the city was great, you know, but, but no, but then my job was transferred to London where they had 19 Vice Consuls and I was the one Vice Consul in Liverpool. And I felt that just mathematically I was more efficient than their Consular Section was in terms of, you know, the production of visas that we did up there, you know. So they started -- we, we made a decision, you know, that we weren't going to -- our -- since our employees were losing their jobs, although maybe if they wanted to move to London, you know, they could keep working. But none of them did, you know. So we didn't want to work their fingers to the bone, you know, in a dying post, you know. So we just started packing up all the passports that came in and shipping them to London. And it was like, "What's all this? What are these big bags of passports we're getting?"

"Well, that's our workload that you're taking over now that we're closing, so get used to it," you know, sort of thing *(laughs).* And they -- you felt like London was trying to close us down instead of trying to save us, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- but didn't seem to be the case, you know. So anyway, I just didn't really want to go to London because I've done -- they -- I -- he -- I got -- I went down there for a month of TDY (temporary duty) when they were an officer short one time and, you know, it was nice to be in London but it wasn't fun to work there. It was like being in a factory, only you're producing visas --

Q: Also, I know I was in consular personnel at one point, and we realized that we were doing which every other personnel officer hiring the job had done, was taking all our problem cases and sending them to London. These were either people didn't get along well with people, had a drinking problem, or had an elderly mother they had to take care of. It's only because -- well, they don't have a language thing.

FROST: Yeah, and it's also, for medical purposes it's like the U.S.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: One of the few posts that is.

Q; yeah, so --

FROST: Yeah, there were, there were not -- there were some dim bulbs there when I was there, clearly dim bulbs. I recognized -- I didn't have a lot of background, but I recognized that they were not stars, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know? *(laughs)* So you know, that was -- it was -- but anyway, I just didn't want any part of working in that embassy, you know, because I -- among -- and first of all I came down with a terrible flu when I was there and I was home sick most of the time, but I had been there long enough to know that if you read the paper -- if you're still reading -- finished reading the paper at five after nine when you should be working they'll come and yell at you and that sort of stuff. So I just sort of -- so I call up my buddy Dan Welter my Career Development Officer and said, "Well Dan, I don't, I don't want to go -- I don't want to go to London and surely you can get any number of people who would be delighted to go there, since it's London, you know? Why does it have to be me, you know? So is there anywhere else I could go, you know? Because I don't think I should just be shipped down there along with the visa machines, you know?"

And so it turns out, "Well, there's either Lagos, Nigeria or Kingston, Jamaica." And we had -- we had picked up a couple Liverpool cats that we'd adopted from somebody who lived in a basement flat somewhere. So we had pets then. Jamaica had a quarantine and Nigeria didn't. So, "Well, I guess we'll go to Nigeria. You know, why not? Sounds interesting, you know." So that changed the whole course of my career. I mean, you know, in many ways, you know, made me --

Q: The cats did it.

FROST: Yep, yep. And that was a big change, I tell you, from Liverpool. Big change.

Q: Well, you were, you were in Lagos?

FROST: Yes.

Q: For how long?

FROST: For two years.

Q: from when to when?

FROST: From June '76 to August of '78.

Q: OK. What was the situation in Nigeria when you went there?

FROST: It was, it was very tense because the, the military -- they had a military government, one of a series over the years. The Head of State, a guy named Murtala Mohammed had been assassinated in I think March or so of, of '75, in a failed coup, before I arrived in June. And so there was very much of an unsettled atmosphere.

Q: You say '75 -- you said you were there from --

FROST: No, I'm sorry, '76.

Q: '76.

FROST: Yeah, '76. Yeah, he'd been assassinated in early, in like March of '76 and I came in June of '76, sorry. And so a lot of tension, you know, a lot of paranoia, a lot of xenophobia, anti-foreigner sentiment, so forth. And of course we depend on their oil, you know, and so it's kind of the political climate, which is sort of like, you know, I kind of wondered about this because we were kind of like, you know, let's treat it with kid gloves because we need their oil. I felt well, wait a minute, we give them money for their oil, you know. They can't eat it, they have to sell it to somebody. Who's going to buy it, the Russians? I don't think so. So why are we kowtowing to them- but there's just this kind of desire to keep everything calm as we could, so we put up with a not of abusive treatment from the government. Things weren't calm, you know. The PAO's (Public Affairs Officer) wife had witnessed, had driven by and seen Murtala Mohammed bleeding in his car from where he'd been gunned down, you know, during the coup attempt, you know. And so it was, it was kind of, you know, it was just, it was tense. And they had a couple -- when I got there the, the Head of the Consular Section, he was a FS, FS-02 -- I mean old FS0-04 so he wasn't a Consul General, but he was the First Secretary I guess. He, he spent all of his time -- there were a couple of Americans in jail who worked for an American aircraft company. And there was a lot, I think there a lot of rackets going on, rumors of contraband video equipment when the Nigerian Air Force flew the purchased planes over from the US and stuff. And I don't know what was going on, but these two guys were arrested for gun running, these Americans. And they said they only had some sporting rifles or something they imported. And they were arrested for gun running and they were going to give them 10 years or 20 years or something. And they'd probably die in prison there. So we had to, we had to -- the boss spent all of his time trying to pull strings and do favors for people to get them out, and he did *(laughs).* And so he took me, he took me, he took me to their trial, which was a kangaroo court kind of thing, you know, and they were sentenced to ten years and they dragged them out by their belts. It was very ugly, very ugly scene.

Q: Who was in charge of your Consular Section?

FROST: This was this fellow Tom Gustafson that I mentioned.

Q: And the ambassador was?

FROST: Don Easum, later became President of the African American Institute.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: Former Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, fired by Kissinger. Had Kissinger's picture hung upside down in his office *(laughs).* I was sworn in by Kissinger, by the way.

Q: Huh.

FROST: Yeah, they were -- the personnel people were trying to get him to give a speech on personnel and they had to have a venue for it, so it turned out to be our swearing in. And I can't remember a word he said, but I don't think anybody else did either. But he wasn't much interested in that, needless to say.

Q: No (chuckles). Well, you're mainly doing what, visas?

FROST: Yeah, mainly, I was mainly -- the big stock and trade there that just devoured us, I mean we had other work and we were just consumed by student visas. They were just coming at us.

Q: Well, you know, the Nigerians earned a reputation in the United States of being as involved in confidence --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- fraud --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- anything you can think of, very clever --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- but dishonest as all hell.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: I would imagine the visas would have been too.

FROST: Yeah, it was -- there was a lot of fraud and it wasn't very sophisticated, and a lot of these people didn't seem like -- didn't seem like they were college worthy as far as my recent college experience was concerned, you know, and yet there they were, they were, they were going, or they wanted to go, desperate to get out of there.

Q: Well, what were we doing? Were we letting most of the students go?

FROST: We had a pretty high refusal rate, so -- but they kind of, they kind of wore us down sometimes. You know, you'd just be there on a Friday afternoon, your last interview of the day, and this guy had already been seen about five or six times and he really wasn't very good, but you just sort of say -- sort of threw in the towel, you know, sort of an attrition factor going on I think in a way. We didn't -- and -- but we were, we were seen as tough, you know, and, and we were. I mean we at least, we at least made it,

made it difficult for them certainly. And they had plenty of foreign exchange and plenty of money, I mean, you know, because it's the oil boom, you know. But the question is, was this distant uncle really going to pay for them to go to school or not? Or were they really intending to go to school or, you know. And they all, their, their, their dreams were bigger than their, than their talents I guess, a lot of them. And you know, we were just trying to stop the ones that were going to be driving a cab in three months, you know *(laughs).* We end up -- we had a fairly low standard, but I think the rest of the embassy saw us as a bunch of racist, nasty, negative people, you know, which we really weren't. We gave them every chance, I thought *(laughs).*

Q: What was life like in Lagos?

FROST: Very hard. Traffic was terrible, you know, it was the -- it was just a tough, it was really tough place to live. Chaotic, you know, and --

Q: What sort of quarters did you have?

FROST: We, let's see, when we first moved -- first got there we lived in a place called Fernandez Towers or Tower Fernandez, which was a ten-story apartment building with very small two-bedroom apartments owned by a Nigerian chief type named Fernandez -- there were a number of ex-Brazilian slaves that had returned to Africa and made their fortunes at some point after slavery ended in Brazil. And so Fernandez was one of these, kind of a rich big man type, you know. And thing is we're right smack dab in the middle of this, of this teeming African neighborhood, you know, it wasn't really, you know, a residential area per se, you know. And we're right in the middle of -- on Lagos Island near the embassy, which it's good to be near the embassy from work point of view. Although we worked, we worked -- the Consular Section was located in a different building on a different island. But you know, it was -- and they would have these festivals and these kids would smoke a lot of dope and dance on top of your cars and stuff and it just kind of, you know, it's just sort of like rough, you know. Best part of being where we were was, was that there was a place called the Plaza Cinema that would show -- change movies twice a week and show grade B and B- movies that the U.S. had written, and a few Chinese kung-fu and -- I mean, you know, and Indian movies and stuff to boot. But we did a lot of those, but we went to every movie that was shown there practically, because there was nothing to do.

Q: How did your wife find it?

FROST: Well, she worked -- she got a series of sort of PIT jobs they were called then.

Q: Part time employment.

FROST: Yeah, so she worked, she worked as a fill-in secretary in the Econ Section for a while and then when they were building a new embassy building on -- and she was, she was hired -- they'd had an State Department construction manager out there and she was

hired as the secretary to the sites to him, so she worked on the site of the new embassy in a trailer or something.

Q: Well, did you have much contact socially with Nigerians?

FROST: Not a lot, you know. And, and I remember we had, we had Inspectors -- I was I was annoyed because I had a -- we had a -- the, the boss that was there when I was there left a few months after I arrived and was replaced with a really nice old classy guy, Jim Huffman who was a Consular Officer. Great guy really. We became very close friends. I loved him as a boss. And -- but we were asked -- we had a cranky old inspector from the bygone era. Our section was a mess, there's no question about it, but it wasn't really -- it was just none of our faults, it was just, you know, the way it was there. And but she was -- and she -- one of the questions she asked me was, you know, are -- kind of a loaded question -- are you, are you encouraged from having -- to have contacts with the locals? And it was sort of like, well, you know, we don't really want to have contacts with the locals because it just makes our jobs harder, because we'll get, we'll get strong armed for visas for all their damn cousins that aren't, that aren't eligible and stuff, you know. So it makes it harder to do our jobs because we, they, they can't do anything for us that's not illegal or, you know. We don't owe them anything on the other hand, but they think we do. They're going to try to squeeze every little favor out of us they can. So you know, no. And I didn't -- I, you know, I was, I think I was -- and then it came out of the report as, "Consular Officers are discouraged from having contacts with the locals."

I was so annoyed off because it made my new boss look bad, you know, I went to him and said, "Jim, I didn't really say that, you know, just so you know," you know, that I'm not, you know, made me mad as hell. Because we were in just such a difficult position, pressures were so, so high. At least, you know, it seemed like a lot-- and we had -- my first that had gotten -- the guy that had gotten the two people out of jail, you know, he, he did -- I always admired him for this. He, he, he played it for what it was -- I mean he, he called in any favor. He would ask us to do favors, you know, and we would -- he would say, "Interview this guy and if you can help him, fine, if not, let me know," you know. He wouldn't say, "You have to issue him this visa or whatever," you know. And he orchestrated this pressure campaign against the government, which I think was kind of behind the back of the front office. Because like when, when these guys got their 10-year sentence he called -- he radioed back the Consular Section and closed down and said, "Everybody go home, no more visas today, we're finished for today." And then he would have -- he -- we were under instructions, every person with even a remote government position, like the Director of Civil Aviation who wanted to go to a conference in New York something. And he had an official passport and he was qualified and we would give him a visa normally. But sort of like, you know, any of those cases, "Refer them back to me personally and I will interview them." So get this guy back in his office and say, "Well, Mr. Director of Civil Aviation, you know, you want to go to New York for this conference, so let's talk about my problem. My two guys who are in jail and then we'll talk about yours, you know." And he just kind of, I don't know how he did it, but it was, it was, you know, he was, he was -- and so I basically let the guy go as a favor to him when he left I think, you know. And I thought I learned a lot from him as far as, you

know -- and like I say, the front office I think would have been horrified if they knew the stuff he was pulling, you know.

Q: Yeah, because two Consular Officers talking to each other that we have here, there are a certain number of things that you never let anyone know --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- you're doing. I mean you certainly don't keep the ambassador or Washington informed of the certain things that you do in order to get something accomplished.

FROST: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Q: You were there what, two years?

FROST: Yeah.

Q: Did you have any feel for Africa or interest in it? Or how'd you feel about it?

FROST: Well, I don't know. It was, it was, like I say, I was -- one thing I always tell people is that a lot of times, you know, I was so glad to leave when, you know, when my tour was up. I could hardly wait, you know. I was just fed up with this place, you know. And the Nigerians, you know, like you say, they're very difficult people. And in -- so a lot of times I wished I weren't there anymore, but I never wished I had never come. I realized I was learning from the experience, even though, even the parts of it that weren't fun at all, you know.

Q: And then you went then in '78?

FROST: Yep.

Q: Where did you go?

FROST: I went to Lyon, France as Vice Consul.

Q: Ah.

FROST: Which I truly deserved, from the hardship tour in from Nigeria, plus I had four plus, four plus French.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know? And I was sort of an expert on the country, I'd lived there, so to speak. So, so that was, that was a dream. That was --

Q: How long were you in Lyon?

FROST: Two years also, little over two -- two and two and -- two and a bit.

Q: What was the role of Lyon consular wise in France?

FROST: Well, they had five consulates in France back then: Marseilles, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, Lyon, and Nice. We were one of five. And they were -- as in the words of an Irish colleague that I got to know later at another post, it was a -- they were all "man-boy" operations, you know, and older, experienced Consul and a younger, junior Vice Consul -- and I was the "boy." We did, you know, a fair amount -- not -- many fewer visas that we did in Liverpool, because the French didn't travel to the States like the Brits did. But it was, you know, American Citizen Services, representation, you know, a lot, a lot -- just showing the flag and attending stuff and --

Q: What were the politics of Lyon?

FROST: Well, they had kind of a strange city. They were -- it was a very bourgeois, but very much of a growing concern than, than Bordeaux had been, you know, when I was there as a student-- progressive, prosperous, growing. But they'd had these whole series of -- there was a guy named Édouard Herriot who was, who was Mayor of Lyon, if you can believe it, from like 1914 to 1958.

Q: President of France, wasn't he?

FROST: Yes, he was, he was Prime Minister before that too, I think Yeah, during the like inter-war years, yeah. He was a very -- he was a national politician. And you know, in France, even to this day you can be a mayor and a senator at the same time and --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and, and a minister all at the same time. And so he was. After him they had Louis Pradel for years, but he was really a purely local guy, whereas at least Herriot had national standing. And when I was there the had a guy named Francis Collomb So they had like three mayors between 1914 and the time I was there. And we were on the third one while I was there, so it was kind of insular. And then they had Raymond Barre, who was Prime Minister for a while back then when Giscard was President and who was an MP from Lyon, they call a "parachutist" –not local but put there to occupy a safe seat in Parliament. And he was just stuck in there, you know, by the party, whatever. So, so it's kind of interesting to have the Prime Minister be from there, you know, sort of from there. The city was very business oriented, conservative in that sense.

Q: What sort of business was going on there? Was there any particularly big business?

FROST: Well, they had kind of like chemical industries and pharmaceuticals and kind of, kind of -- you know, I'm thinking more high tech cutting edge now than it was historically, when they had the silk and textiles, before you had all the information stuff,

you know. So very much -- they saw themselves as kind of a rival to Milan and Turin and places like that, kind of -- not the heavy-industry rust-belt type city.. There was Saint Etienne to the west, where they used to have a lot of coal and steal and that kind of industry. But they didn't really have that in Lyon. It was more light industry sort of things I guess you could say.

Q: Well, were there many French students going to the United States in those days?

FROST: No, not very many.

Q: Mm-hmm. It's not the time of the American challenge?

FROST: Yeah, there was that. Because -- well, Lyon was a little bit ingrown, a little bit, as we found when we got involved with the community there because of our French, you know. But they were still very open and welcoming to us, you know. But there was a group called "Rhone Accueil," which was kind of what "welcome wagon" is in the U.S. for new people that were transferred or moved there from other parts of France, you know, and didn't have a -- because France is very family, group oriented society. And so people kind of go to a new place and don't feel like they have, you know, it's their job maybe to be there, but they don't fit in, you know, their family's somewhere else in the country, whatever, you know. So we joined this group and we were there for two plus years and none of us were new anymore by the time two years had gone by. But we still hung out together. We had a bridge club that played every week or so at different people's houses. And we had one guy that was -- loved the Romanesque churches and Auvergne, and he would take us out on these little hikes and excursions and stuff like that. It was fun, you know. So that's our group of friends really, just a bunch of French people that were like, you know, young professionals I guess I would say mainly.

Q: Did the hand of the embassy rest heavily or lightly on you all?

FROST: It was pretty light. The Consul General, guy named Bill Morgan --

Q: Bill and I wrote a book together.

FROST: Oh, you did? Bill, yeah, Bill was kind of a larger than life character.

Q: Oh yeah.

FROST: In certain ways. And he was the, he was in charge of all the consulates, you know, as the Consul General in Paris. And he was a good guy and we got along, you know, we liked him, he liked us, and my boss and I got along, got along well. And but so he, you know, we were basically, you know, he was interested in -- it's about right, I would say. We sort of felt like, for example, the CG for some reason -- and it wasn't anything personal, you know, but, but the locals there just kind of like -- we, were just a mere consulate and it was *the embassy.* So if, if it came time, if they wanted somebody to come down and do a representational kind of thing, you know, the -- the French people

would always want somebody from the embassy. And it would always piss off my boss because he'd sort of say, "Well," guy named Carol Floyd was his name, from Arkansas, great guy, Econ Officer. But he would, he would, he would just get livid, say, "I'm a Consul General, you know, you know, I'm, I'm, you know, I'm a Colonel, whatever, you know. You know, why aren't I good enough? Why does it always -- they really have some Junior Political Officer from Paris because he's from, just because he's from the embassy than they would me who's the consul General in this district, you know?" *(laughs).* It was kind of weird about them in a way that the embassy was for them this huge powerful thing and we were just this little consulate.

Q: Well, there is this, this feeling, you know, I mean the title and all. Was there much anti-Americanism at the time or?

FROST: Not really, no. Didn't seem to be -- it was -- I didn't feel it really, hardly. And of course I was, I was so assimilated in terms of my, you know, French background, and my wife too, that we, we were, we were sort of honorary French in certain respects I guess you'd say. I was there when Giscard lost to Mitterrand. All the bourgeois people there, people I knew in context, they were all panicking about that and, "God, we're going to have a Socialist President and it's going to be terrible," you know.

"No, your three-star restaurants will still be there. You'll just -- they'll just be a bit more expensive, but nothing'll really change."

Q: What was your wife doing?

FROST: Well, she, she got -- she was able to work as a PIT doing visas some of the time, you know, even though it didn't seem to be a problem for summer, summer hire kind of stuff, you know. But she just really enjoyed living in France. We both joined an amateur choir there and our, our group would combine with a couple other choirs and sing with the Lyon Symphony, you know, concerts that people actually paid to attend, you know, major choral works with symphony backing us up and professional soloists brought in, and some from the U.S., you know. And that was our, that was our main hobby there, you know, so we had -- so when they had a group, a group of friends from that group, from the choir as well. And that was lots of fun. We did a lot of traveling too, because my boss liked to travel and I like -- we like to travel. So basically I don't know how we did it, but during the two years that we were there each year, I don't know how I had enough leave to do this, let alone the money, but we did two three-week vacations each year, a spring one and a fall one generally.

Q: Good heavens.

FROST: We drove all the way through -- we drove down through Spain, toured parts of Spain, ended up in Morocco, and went all the way to Marrakesh and back in our car. And we did another trip to, where we just got visas for -- got it cleared and everything and got our -- got visas for -- we had one friend in Krakow from A-100 and another friend in East Berlin, and we drove from France over there, over, over to Vienna and then transmitted

up through Czechoslovakia to Krakow and went to Auschwitz and went to Krakow and stuff. And then we drove over from there to East Berlin back to France. Those were two of our vacations, three weeks each.

Q: Well, was there any significant immigration from Lyon to the States?

FROST: No, not really. They had a -- the closest thing was the Clermont-Ferrand, which was kind of the headquarters of Michelin. They had a Michelin plant in I think North Carolina, which is still there.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And -- but no, there was, there was very little.

Q: Well, then you left there when?

FROST: It January of '81.

Q: Must have been quite a wrench.

FROST: Yeah, it, it was, especially coming back to Washington.

Q: So I think this is probably a good place to stop. Where -- but we'll put it at the end here so we'll know where to pick it up. Where did you go, I mean what were you doing in Washington?

FROST: I was the Assistant Desk Officer for South Africa, AF/S.

Q: OK.

FROST: For two years.

Q: We'll pick it up then.

FROST: OK.

Q: OK. Today is the 16th of March, 2012 with Greg Frost. Greg, you were saying that you wanted to expand on when you were in Iran.

FROST: When I was in France, actually.

Q: I mean France, dealing with the visa fallout from the Iran Hostage Crisis.

FROST: Yes, uh-huh. Well, I was in -- my tour in Leon that I've already talked about was from October '78 to January of '81. So that corresponded with the Iranian Hostage Crisis, all of it, in fact. I believe the hostages were taken on November 4th, 1979 and they

were released on January 20th, 1981. So I thought it would be of interest to discuss the -- what I know about the visa situation of Iranian passport holders --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- in France at that time. The -- France was a country that a lot of them came to that were basically refugees, mostly pro-Shah people that were fleeing pretty much the Islamic Republic, which they didn't want any part of it. And they were -- essentially most of them were -- not all, but most were religious and/or ethnic minorities. You had -- all Iranian citizen passport holders, you had Jews, Zoroastrians, Bahá'ís on the religious side. And then on the ethnic side you had Kurds and Azeris. I'm not sure -- trying to think, there must have been some others. But those were the -- those were the groups that I, that I remember. And so they wanted to -- they wanted -- Jimmy Carter, one of his measures against Iran when the hostages were taken was to immediately -- he froze all their assets, of course, around the world. And he also invalidated all non-immigrant visitor visas and Iranian passports were declared invalid and they had to -- they had to be revalidated. So they couldn't be use to travel in the States. And new cases also had to -- so revalidations and new cases all had to be approved by Washington. You had to send them in and send a cable and ask for their approval to issue them a visa. So these people started to show up at the posts in France asking for visas. Paris was the embassy of course, and then we had the five consulates, all that did visas, which were -- I'm not sure they did them in Strasbourg, I think maybe not, but Lyon, Marseilles, Nice, and Bordeaux, all, all did visas. And so the question is is that how would these people be handled and what would, what would -- how would they, you know, how would it all work? So Paris, nobody really wanted to deal with these people because what was in it for us? And wasn't part of our relations with France, of course, and you know, we had enough work already or thought we did. So we -- Paris kind of took the attitude of -- I think when -- as tourists in France these people, I don't think they needed visas to come to France at that time. But they were allowed -- but they were allowed to stay for 40 days. So Paris would do interview them by appointment only, and guess what, you know, appointments would be on day 41 on out.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So hopefully they're not a problem because they'll have -- they'll be illegal in France and they've -- you can refuse them on that basis, I suppose, or they have to worry about, you know, what would happen when they left and they'd overstayed and blah, blah, blah. So that was kind of the way -- and Paris of course was -- we were, you know, one person visa sections everywhere else --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and Paris was large. So they could -- they were more equipped to handle them, but they, they, they kind of passed the buck, so to speak. Any questions, or? I go -- I have more, but I mean, you know --

Q: Yeah, well let's talk a little more about it. I mean --

FROST: How it came -- how it came down is quite interesting, like I said --

Q: Because actually what we were doing is a little like hitting the people who were essentially our friends.

FROST: Yeah, these people -- none of these people were bad guys or security threats or any of this sort of thing and they were well to do generally, you know, leaders in their society. No longer, of course. So you're exactly right. It was basically, what we were doing kind of was running a refugee program on tourist visas. Essentially we didn't want to run an open refugee asylum type program because we didn't want to irritate the people that were holding our, our hostages. And you know, that -- and we didn't want to -- we didn't want to take that risk. So kind of what we were doing was -- the thing is, these were good people, they were financially solvent like I say, their lives were probably not worth a whole lot in the Islamic Republic. And so the first thing -- but the question is is that, you know, none of them had ties to Iran anymore. They used to, you know, but they didn't have a place to go back to really, because it sort of wasn't their country anymore, so to speak. So first of all, the, the, the, the policy line in, in Washington, which was -- I mean it was coming out of the visa office, but it was, you know, higher than that, I'm sure, was that we were supposed to -- and Consular Officer's we're saying, "Yeah, these people, I mean they're, the famous Section 214(b) where you have to -- you're assumed to be an attending immigrant from the U.S. when you apply for a tourist visa until you establish otherwise." And these people really didn't meet the standard for a tourist visa anymore, even the ones that had a ten-year one that was, you know, that was invalidated. All you had to do was stamp it, revalidate it and they could go. But that was the question. And you know, so we took our oath and our responsibilities to the law quite seriously as Junior Consular Officers in France. And so it was, it was like -- and they -- we were supposed to evaluate their ties to a "post-crisis Iran." And that was kind of the same line, as I recall, that was used in -- during the Lebanese Civil War a few years earlier. They talked about ties to a "post-crisis Lebanon," which was, you know, was kind of a realistic concept. Lebanon has gotten better, I think more or less overall, but it took quite a while. But you know, these were, these were the former leaders that, you know, until all hell broke loose were, were good visa candidates. So but everybody said -- and the Shah of course was admitted to the States, which was, you know, precipitated the Hostage Crisis. The Shah went to Mexico afterwards, and he died. So it's kind of like well -- at some point we all said well, post-crisis Iran is here and this is it. It's called the Islamic Republic. And they're not our friends and they have our hostages now and blah, blah, blah. So you know, this is kind of a, you know, a fantasy concept, you know, this post-crisis Iran. So, so we were just kind of uncomfortable issuing visas to people who were ineligible under the law, clearly, you know. And but I -- Washington, of course -- one of the -- when one of the things I think that was driving this was kind of feeling in the upper levels of the Carter administration, I don't have any knowledge of that per se, but I'm pretty sure that from what I read in the press that this was going on, was that -- particularly in regards to the Jewish Iranians, I think which is one of the largest and most powerful groups of these people, they didn't want a repeat of, you know, 1939 -- '38, '39,

’40, when people were fleeing Nazi Germany because they were Jewish and, and we were not welcoming to them. And, and, you know, they, they were these ships wandering the seas and so on and so forth.

Q: I was involved slightly in this part time, but we were giving Iranian Jews basically special consideration.

FROST: Uh-huh.

Q: And Bahá'ís. But the others were not treated as gently, I --

FROST: Yeah, I don’t know. I’m trying to think what the, what the, the approval rate was pretty high for all groups, but I think the Bahá'ís and the -- I agree, I think the Bahá'ís were probably the most persecuted. The Zoroastrians, throw them in too. But, but you’re exactly right, that they were, they were -- but what happened is that the Consular Officers, you know, kind of, we, we, we kind of, you know, were cranky about it. We made our feelings known up the chain of command. And, and so what happened is Washington came with, with a policy that said OK, if you think these people really aren’t going home and they’re ineligible under 214-B because they’re attending immigrants and they’re not tourists, well, that’s fine, you can do that, but you -- you can refuse them, but you still have to submit their cases to Washington in the cases of those groups, Jews, et cetera, so that Washington can determine that immigration -- I think it’s immigration that makes these rulings, that they give them humanitarian parole.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Because that they said that the only people -- I should add -- I should have added at the beginning, when Carter invalidated all their visas he said that the only Iranians that are going to be allowed to travel to the U.S. during, you know, while they hold our hostages are people who, who travels in the national interest or compelling humanitarian grounds, which are historically the two grounds for people who are ineligible that you can waive them in, you know. So I said to myself at the time right at the beginning of this, “Well, that’s, that’s pretty easy. You know, the national interest is the guy who can tell us how many barrels they’re pumping from their wells and refineries and so forth and intelligence source and the like, and you know, the compelling humanitarian grounds is some guy dying of cancer, and needs some desperate treatment only available in the U.S., you know, something like that. But of course they, they, they consider, they interpreted that just being a member of one of these groups was sufficient to, to get you, to get you through them, you know, to, to, to be compelling humanitarian grounds, you know, or national interest --

Q: There was another factor in there, if I recall. And that was that in Los Angeles, maybe a couple other places, you had -- Iranians were students, had come in legitimately as students and get caught up in the fervor of the revolution and were out demonstrating in the streets and causing a certain amount of trouble. You know, and we weren’t -- these

were people who were demonstrating in favor of the people who were holding our hostages. And that really soured things too.

FROST: We had -- I guess you're right. I don't really remember that, because I was in France of course, but I'm sure you're correct. And I know there was kind of a, there was kind of a -- they checked out all the Iranians such as they could find them, all the Iranian students that were there, you know. And basically they would, you know, haul them in for interviews and stuff like that. And if they were trouble making, rabble-rousers, sympathizers towards this thing they might put them under deportation proceedings or something. If they were innocent they would just sort of say well, as long as you are legal, you know, you and stay and blah, blah, blah. But the students were -- because the people that took the hostages claimed to be students, didn't they?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Exactly. So yeah, you're exactly right. I had an immigration lawyer -- this is about a decade later when I was working in Tijuana -- I knew an immigration lawyer from LA (Los Angeles) who had a lot of Iranian clients. And he swore up and down to me that they were, they were poor innocent Iranian citizens, probably residents or students I suppose mainly, in Los Angeles that were taken out by, you know, patriotic Americans, so to speak, and, and, and shot up in the canyons outside of L.A. and stuff. He claimed that there was really violence perpetrated against some of these people who were innocent. But I don't know, that may be --

Q: I've never heard that.

FROST: But I'm sure it was uncomfortable for them at the time.

Q: Oh, it certainly was, oh yes --

FROST: But the thing was is that -- so I sent these -- I realize we sent these cases in and -- my life was complicated by the fact that my boss, you know, it was a two-person boss. The Consul General was my boss and he was not a Consular Officer, he was an Econ Officer. But we got along fine and we had a good relationship and so forth. But he basically, there was kind of a hot shot US immigration lawyer, the name I won't mention, who had a lot of rich Iranian clients and these kind of people. And so basically s/he sort of got to him and she said, "Well, you take my cases," because it was kind of local option, whatever we wanted to do. You know, we could either take a case or not take it. They were out of district, so theoretically we did not have to not let -- give them a hearing. But clearly Washington didn't want us to do that and it wasn't fair to the people. They deserved a hearing even if the answer was no, whatever. So, so he agreed to sort of take his/her clients. And I felt that, that wasn't quite correct, you know, that we were going to take those cases we should take anybody who asks. Because I mean it's, you know, they shouldn't be favored I don't think. Only his/hers, you know, that should -- that's not right, you know? So I -- and I was the one that was doing the work, because I was the Visa Officer. So I thought well, OK, if, if, if -- I'll -- we'll, we'll take these rich

Iranians that are being referred by this hotshot lawyer, but we're going to take anybody else who came in too, and we're not going to ask -- we're not going to do appointments. We're just going to take them as we have time for them, you know. And so that's, that's what, that's what we did. And you know, the, the, the -- most of them would come back approved, I think pretty much, I can't remember -- there's one that they gave me trouble on though that showed to be, you know, I was just trying to be fair and yet, and yet, you know, in line with the policy. There was a, there was a guy who -- he was a nominal Muslim, you know, very progressive, modern, rich, pro-Shah type, who showed me pictures of him and the Shah inspecting the tote board at a racetrack that he built for the Shah. And I thought well, this life is -- this guy's life is really not going to be work a plug nickel in the Islamic Republic. But he's not one of the groups, you know? So I, I sent him in. And then he came back rejected and they said, "You'll have to, you know, you'll have to show more evidence that this guy, you know, this guy's deserving beyond his self-serving statements," or something like that. It just kind of annoyed me because I sort of felt that he was being discriminated against because he was not the right religion. But he was clearly fleeing in the same way the others were. So I basically kept sending him in. I sent him in once or twice more until they finally caved in and approved him, and he went, you know.

And then I had kind of the flip side of this. This was a -- this was a Jewish Iranian who I think was basically -- I think he had an Israeli passport too, but he had business in Iran and he was kind of playing both sides against the middle a little bit, you know, and wheeler dealer stuff. And so he -- the purpose of his trip was to go shopping in New York. And I said -- I thought, "Well, here's a guy that really has a good reason to go back other than to just go and stay there and be a refugee," you know, and he's traveling back and forth -- he's a business man traveling back and forth to Iran and stuff like that. But on the other hand, how is going shopping in New York—does that constitute compelling humanitarian grounds in any way, shape or form?

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: So I sent him and I said that, you know, I said, "Yeah, he's eligible. He's not actually 214-B. I'd give him a visa if he had any other nationality, but he's got this Iranian passport and I'm not -- I fail to see where shopping in New York City constitutes compelling humanitarian grounds."

Well, it was approved over my negative recommendation, so obviously the handwriting's on the wall as to what's really going on here. We're running a refugee program on tourist visas, there's no question about it. So anyway, I think I probably did more, more Iranian visas in my little post in Lyon than Paris did *(laughs).* But they're the big Consular Section. So you know, I, it was, you know, it was kind of fun in a way. You had to write out the cases and talk to these people and get their stories and, you know. But you know, I'm sure that almost all of them are still in the States today to the extent that they survive. There was one guy, he was a Kurd, and the lawyer had proven -- this was a, one of the cases of the lawyer I mentioned. He -- I -- we called him the "Six-Million Dollar Kurd", because he had six million dollars in liquid assets, you know. And of course, you know,

he just wanted to take that money to the States. I thought, "Well gee, if we can deprive the, the ayatollah of this money, it's a good thing."

Q: Yes, absolutely.

FROST: So, so, and I followed hostage crisis. We -- one day I was, I think I was at my boss's house maybe or something, having dinner, and I got a call from the local police. And they said, "Well, we've got some news for you. There's been a demonstration about the hostages in front of your consulate."

And we thought, "Really?"

But it's -- the thing -- he said, "Yes, but they were, they were pro-U.S. and anti, you know, Iran. And they chained themselves to the gates." He said, "Well, we figured since they were on your side we just, we just unchained them and took them down to the station and took their identification and, and stuff and then let them go. We hope that's OK."

Said, "Yeah, that's fine," you know. So I -- next day I wrote a little short little cable. I thought, "Well, I'll entertain the people on the task force a little bit." So I, I sent a little short little unclassified cable and I used the subject line "Pro-U.S. demonstration against the hostage takers in Lyon," colon, "With friends like this…" dot, dot, dot. So that ought to give them a little laugh to make them, you know, make their morning the next day. So and of course I, it was -- I remember this very well. We were -- we left for our new assignment on the South Africa desk in the State Department just at the end of January.

So our -- pretty much our very last week in France we did a one-week ski trip to Courchevel and the 3 Valleys in the Alps, which was heaven. My wife and I. And so I remember coming down at the end of a run that day and hearing from somebody at the -- waiting for the next lift that, "Hey, the American hostages have been released." It was January 20th, 1981 when Ronald Reagan was --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- you know, inaugurated. And they were released. And so it was a really joyous day. And, and, and that was the end of -- that was the end of, the end of the affair. And I, I, you know, have a very close friend that I didn't know at the time that was a hostage in fact. And a couple, a couple of the other ones I knew or met at some point or other. So I was very much -- I took it very personally.

Q: Well, I think all of us did.

FROST: And, and people have forgotten now, only we old guys remember it. But it was, it was -- I felt that it was, you know, this was an enemy country, essentially, as far as the government was concerned. Not that everybody supported it or anything, but it was an enemy country. I thought, "Well gee, did we -- did we give visas to Germans, you know,

in 1941 and '42?" And I don't know, I mean I can't imagine -- it must have been a little bit different. I guess innocent people suffer and, you know, I'm not saying that's right, but you know --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- in war. But now it's kind of faded to the extent that, you know, Iran's a problem and, you know -- but you know, it's -- I remember several years later I was in Lesotho, another one of posts which we'll talk about later. And there was a USAID (United Stages Agency for International Development) contractor, guy and his wife, very nice people, you know, pro-American type, young old style Shah type Iranians that -- and you know, we'd see them at cocktail parties. It's a small community there. And so they asked me, they said -- the guy says, "Well, I have a sister..." Iranians were wandering the world trying to get places that would take their visa cases," because they still wanted to study in the States, you know, even then, you know. And so, and so, "Well, she's having trouble and she wants to go to school in the States and she's got an I-20 from her school and, you know, she has -- the only place that seems to be taking them is Istanbul and they're all booked up and blah, blah, blah, what do I do?"

I said, "Well look, since I know you, I will," -- and I was the Political Economic Consular Officer. I did everything in this little post except for admin. And so I said, "OK, I'll tell you what. If you can get her to Lesotho, you know, which would mean a visa for South Africa probably and blah, blah, blah, well, you know, "I, I will entertain her case, you know. But I'm telling you, if you breath a word of this to any other Iranian," I said, "because we don't want these people here, we can't handle it, you know," it's in the middle of nowhere, Southern Africa, "I will be so mad at you, you know. You got to promise me on a stack of Korans or whatever that, you know, you're not going to breathe a word of this, you know. And she'll probably get a visa and she'll go and that's fine. But I'm not going to become an Iranian magnet-- because I remember what it was like a few years ago…"

Q: Oh yeah, people were shopping around -- we had people going to Samoa and islands, you know --

FROST: Yeah. And you know, you come under suspicion from the Visa Office if you do that.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: It's like what are these people -- why are you issuing --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know.

Q: And there was a lot of money floating around.

FROST: And that was, that was what I felt about this lawyer a little bit in France. Like I say, I am not suggesting that my boss did anything wrong, but you know, it just doesn't look good.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Because there's a lot of money in this business, you know, the space and, you know. So anyway, that was -- I wanted to -- I just wanted to share that story with you. It was --

Q: I'm glad, because it does illuminate how we all get involved in crises. So then you left Lyon in when?

FROST: In the end of January '81.

Q: And where'd you go?

FROST: I, I -- my assignment was Assistant Desk Officer for South Africa in the Office of Southern African Affairs in the department. I'd kind of decided well, I've done -- I've done two full consular tours, one in Nigeria and the other in France, I want to do something different. Everybody says, "Go back to Washington at this time, it's a good time to go in your career."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: I thought, "Yes, that's true." I don't really want to do a consular job in Washington and there weren't very many at the junior level anyway. Thought, "Well, what can I apply for? Desk officer sounds kind of good and interesting, you know, and I do have some African experience because I had two years in Lagos such as it was as a consular officer. So I'll," -- I applied for this job at the South Africa desk. And of course it was off cycle because it was like February. It's open, you know. So I, yeah, I got the job. And, and, and that was -- I was kind of excited about that to come back.

Q: And you did that from when to when?

FROST: It was from -- so it was from February of -- beginning of February of '81 until the summer of '83, so that was basically two and a half years.

Q: Well, first place who was your sort of boss, I mean in Africa Affairs?

FROST: Well, let's see. We had -- we had a -- Office of Southern African Affairs it was the geographic, you know, split up like most of them are. So our office handled Namibia, Angola, South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia, and Malawi, and Zimbabwe. Those were the countries that we had. We had a Director and a Deputy Director. South Africa, because it was a, it was a giant in the region, the most important

country we had, was handled by two officers. I was a, I was a, my job was -- I'm not sure whether it was a FS, FS-3 or 4. The senior one was an FS-2. So I was the junior of two Desk Officers who spent all of our time on South Africa. And it was kind of awkward because we had a, we had -- we didn't have a good relationship, which I won't go into. But, but he -- I was the only one in the office that didn't report to the deputy or the director. And you know, the other officers had their own country or maybe they had even more than one country. Like we had the BLS Desk Officer, which stood for Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, the three little countries that we had. And he -- and she handled all those three countries. Whereas I handled just a chunk of South Africa. And of course the other guy was senior to me and he took all the fun stuff and left me with the --

Q: Well I, you know, I don't want to get too much into personalities, but I think it's important to understand a bit about the life in a bureaucracy and all. What were sort of the problems that you had with your --

FROST: Well, the thing is it was an especially stressful time. This was the beginning of the Reagan administration, you know.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And Reagan, as opposed to Carter, there was almost a, almost a virtual 180° turn, certainly a 90 ° turn, somewhere in between the two I would say, in policy between South Africa. Jimmy Carter had, you know, instituted an Arms Embargo against South Africa for the first time. There was a very frosty bad relationship with the apartheid government. You know, we were clearly in favor of, you know, black rule. I mean, the Carter administration was. And, and that was all changing right then when I came there. And it just so happened Chester Crocker was the new Assistant Secretary, and he was a South Africa hand and academic. And he was -- he hadn't -- it was several months after I arrived that -- before he was even confirmed. And because he was thought not to be right wing enough for the Reagan administration. And Jesse Helms sent him a list of 75 questions that he had to answer, and he was put through the ringer in his confirmation hearings and so on and so forth to assure that yeah, he was going to -- he was going to have a better relationship with the apartheid government and, you know, they called it a "constructive engagement," you know. And, and, and so there was just a firestorm of -- political firestorm around, around South Africa and our policy towards them. That was, that was the thing we all lived with, you know. But you're right, the bureaucracy. When I look back over that assignment, learning how to, how to function in a bureaucracy, especially when you're dealing with a really conflicted issue, is -- I mean there were offices that we were enemies with just because they were them and we were us, so to speak. I mean for example, I remember I had -- one of my, one of the, the -- I guess, I think it was the Acting Director at the time, I remember we -- one of -- we, we were trying to prove that we were not just in bed with the apartheid government, that we were really trying to help disadvantaged black people in this apartheid government. And, and so we had -- we were trying to launch a scholarship program for black South Africans to come and study in the States, future leaders of, you know, hopefully a non-racial country at some point. And the problem was the institutions that did that kind of -- those kind of

scholarship programs and training and stuff were like all Democrat outfits, you know. So they kind of set some, some rare -- they fund some black Republican guy somewhere and set him up sort of he, you know, all -- to receive some of this and so on and so forth. But I remember we didn't -- and, and State Department doesn't really handle those things. You know, it used to be USIA (United States Information Agency) and, you know, maybe AID (Agency for International Development), and -- so we, we weren't equipped to handle this, but we were -- somehow we were against the people -- we didn't like the people who were going to handle it, because we thought they were a bunch of liberals and we wouldn't mesh with, you know, our goals and blah, blah, blah. So I remember -- but then USIA wanted this, I remember. And I remember my boss sitting in a meeting with, with his counterpart from USIA saying, "Tell me Bob, how can -- how do you guys think you're going to run this program when you can't even organize a two-car funeral?" Kind of *(laughs)*, you know, we had kind of a combative boss at the time, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, and he was -- we were -- our office was kind of -- sometimes I think that, for example, desks and embassies tend to kind of take on some of their characteristics of their clients, their clients being the host nation and so forth, you know. And so you know, you know how combative apartheid regime was and we were kind of *(laughs)*, we took a little bit -- took, and you know Crocker spent 90% of his time on South Africa because he was Assistant Secretary. I mean Nigeria, West Africa, the rest of the continent is a mess, you know, and it's always going to be the same. But South Africa, that was the focus of everything.

Q: I have a -- it's been finally put in final form, but have an interview, a long series of interviews with Chester Crocker. And he talks about how he had to run an intelligence organization, his own intelligence organization to find out what the American CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) was doing.

FROST: Ah.

Q: You know, because --

FROST: That's interesting.

Q: -- because Bill Casey was sort of running his own, own program there, which was getting in bed with white South Africans, their intelligence service.

FROST: Uh-huh.

Q: Or were trying to sabotage the State Department.

FROST: Uh-huh.

Q: Talk about bureaucratic infighting and all. It's very case-in-point.

FROST: Yeah, I don't doubt that for, for, for a bit, you know. I'm sure that's -- I'm sure that's true.

Q: Well, when you got there, what would you say -- you were the new boy on that particular block -- what seemed to be the attitude towards the future of South Africa? Was it going to be a Night of Long Knives? Was it going to be a more oppressive regime? Or was something nice going to happen? Or what?

FROST: Well, I mean our stated policy was supportive of what we called "peaceful evolutionary change". And Crocker's famous quote was, "I will not be forced to choose…" dot, dot, dot, you know. So we kind of tried to occupy a bit of a middle ground -- and of course the ANC (African National Congress), which is now the government, was blowing things up all over South Africa --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- at the time. They -- we had people like Jesse Helms wanted to declare the ANC had prescribed as a terrorist organization, you know, and treat them as such. And the South African government wanted that, of course. We didn't embrace that, you know. And we, we -- so we tried to, kind of tried to steer this middle course between a kind of protest policy of Carter and kind of -- you know, and I really believed in the policy. I mean I thought it made -- taken at face value I thought it made a lot of sense. But of course a lot of people didn't take it at face value. Oh, we're just, you know, this scholarship program's just a cover for, you know -- and you mentioned the Carter's -- I mean Crocker's comment about the CIA. And this is -- we're in bed with these bad guys and we're just trying to cover it up by putting the best face on it. You know, that was, that was the criticism we had. And I, you know, so it, it was very tough. But we were, you know, trying to steer middle course. And we wanted -- we wanted things to, to evolve peacefully and we were not -- we -- economic sanctions were supported by the Democrats and the anti-apartheid movement, but we didn't -- they wanted to have no contact with South Africa at all. There was a very major event. It was an odd one. This was the South African national rugby team the "Springboks" tour of New Zealand and the US. Rugby was a very white sport in South Africa and even more so it's an Afrikaner dominated sport. So it's -- it's almost religion, you know. And so they, they -- I think the government, South African government kind of cooked this up. They wanted -- they decided they had -- the Springboks were kind of -- and of course they wanted to -- the, the -- I should say that the South Africans were trying to leverage everything they could get out of the United States, you know. It was clear that not even Reagan could break the arms embargo, you know, openly at least. Not even Reagan could just have a normal relationship with him. You know, people were pushing him to. But he couldn't do that. It was politically impossible for the U.S. It was not realistic. Even Reagan knew that, I think, you know. And -- but the South Africans were working with all these people you mentioned on the sort of far right wing, you know, in the U.S. and so forth and they, they were not our friends either. And so we were kind of getting it from both sides in that sense. And they were trying to -- you know, sort of like we were joking about carrots and

sticks and somebody said yeah, well, "Yeah, I mean we don't want to use the stick, but they've eaten up every carrot that we -- we give them a carrot and they eat it up and they want more." So we were trying to normalize some things, for example. We were normalizing visitors from the government could come, whereas before we used to refuse a lot of them visas, you know. There was a whole question -- they're nuclear scientists and how we would treat them, people that we knew were military intelligence or nuclear scientists or whatever. Would we give them visas to attend conferences in the U.S, or not? You know, that sort of thing.

Q: Well, you mentioned the Springboks. What was the --

FROST: Well, anyway, the Springboks, they, they had cooked up a tour for the Springboks, you know, because they hadn't traveled overseas to -- internationally they were sort of banned from international rugby, and so the tours rebel and so forth. But so they were -- they had a conservative government in New Zealand and so they were going to -- the Springboks were touring the U.S. and New Zealand. Now, New Zealand and the Springboks were sort of number one and two in the world.

Q: All Blacks.

FROST: The All Blacks, which were mainly – white they had some Maoris, but they were mainly white and the South African team I think -- I can't remember if they had one black player by then or not, but they may have. But, but they were white teams in white countries essentially, you know, in that sense. And so that was a, that was a big sporting event. And whereas the U.S. was crap in rugby, we weren't any good, you know, we weren't world class at all. So the U.S. tour was just gratuitous -- a gratuitous political thing. They wanted to show that we were accepting them by hosting their team. And some -- there was some big fertilizer magnate that was a sponsor of the South African Rugby Union that I think had promised to fund the U.S. Rugby Football Union for the next 20 years or something in exchange for them agreeing to accept the Springboks and play against them and so forth. And so this was a big event, you know. We didn't want to deny them visas, we just took the "sports and politics don't mix" line. You know, that was sort of our position in -- so we -- many people and groups were pushing us to deny them visas and not let them come. And, and of course in New Zealand, rugby being what it is in New Zealand, it split the country right down the middle. It was a big conflict, you know. And there was some crazy guy who was threatening to crash his plane into the stadium during one of the games, you know, in, in, in, in New Zealand and so on and so forth. And there was so much, so much anti-tour sentiment in the U.S. that they ended up -- they had a game that was supposed to be in Chicago and ended up being in a cow pasture in southern Wisconsin, because, because they had *(laughs)*, they wanted -- if nobody was going to come anyway except for protesters, there weren't going to be any real fans there to speak of, you know. So the tour was kind of -- I mean I think it showed South Africa that they weren't quite accepted, you know, as much as they would have loved to have been. But I was kind of in charge of this particular event, you know, and that was funny. I remember they had a -- they had a -- Jesse Jackson wanted to come in and talk about the tour. And so he got --

Q: The black congressman.

FROST: The black congressman, right, from Chicago. He demanded a meeting that was taken by one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries. I was the note taker in this meeting, you know. So Jackson comes in wearing his characteristic "Beatle boots", and you know, he's, he's trying to push for the fact that these people were -- somehow these people had committed fraud in their visa applications, and therefore we should refuse them. And he said, "Well," you know, he said, "Well, I understand that these people represented themselves as, you know, doctors, lawyers, and accountants and so forth when they applied for their visas." And of course rugby union is an amateur sport, you know. And so I just kind of broke in, you know the Deputy Assistant Secretary didn't really know what he was talking about and I did. And I sort of -- I sort of interjected and said, "Well Mr. Jackson, Reverend Jackson, we knew exactly who these people were when they applied, you know. And we gave them visas on that basis that they were the South African rugby team, you know, the Springboks. And we knew who they were and there was no deception. And yeah, they said they were doctors and lawyers and accountants, but they *are* doctors and lawyers and accountants. You know, they're amateur athletes, you know, and that's what they were. So no, there was no fraud involved." So he -- that was kind of his weak reed that he was leaning on. So we just told them, "Sorry, but we don't agree and they're coming to the States," and you know, it was a very friendly meeting, it wasn't a problem or anything.

Q: There's an interesting moving called "Invictus".

FROST: Yes, I saw it.

Q: Which portrays after Mandela became president, him going to get together with --

FROST: I saw that, yeah.

Q: -- with the Springbok team. And it's a, you know, cooperative.

FROST: Yeah, I, I loved that movie, you know.

Q: It was very well done.

FROST: And I have to tell you, personally, Mandela is a big hero of mine. I don't have many, you know, but I remember when I went out to South Africa it was September of 1981, I went on one of these desk officer orientation trips, went all around the country, you know, and I'd never been there before, you know. And so I remember I took the cable car up to Table Mountain in Cape Town, you know, and sat up there on this beautiful Sunday looking out. Robben Island was, was out there, you know, and I thought, "My God, you know, Nelson Mandela, he's on that island, he's there, you know." And, and it was fascinating. We later found out, back when I came back and a few months later that no, he wasn't there anymore, they moved him to the mainland

because they were already thinking of, you know, thinking ahead to what their -- what was going to happen to him down the road, you know. And so anyway, that -- yeah, he -- that was --

Q: Well, what was the attitude when you were there? Because I mean obviously you're becoming part of a team that's been dealing with a problem. What was the feeling towards Mandela while he was still in prison but might get out? I mean was the feeling that -- I mean here's a raging tiger that's going to do something or what?

FROST: Well, as I say we were, we were kind of playing defense. You know, we were just trying to get the ANC, which was his organization, you know, protect them from being declared a terrorist organization, which we thought would ruin, you know, the future and our relationship with, with them. And, and we would get all sorts of letters. Because I, I figured I answered -- personally answered maybe 75, 80% at least of the Congressional inquiries in sort of, they call them red borders, the letters that we have to answer, you know, from the State Department and so forth, the Congressionals and others. You know, I handled about -- personally about 75, 80% of those letters to the entire Africa Bureau because I was the Junior Desk Officer, they got dumped on me.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, about, "Free Nelson Mandela! Free Nelson Mandela! Free Nelson Mandela!" You know, it was a very popular movement. And so we, we had this really weasely position I think at the time when we answered these letters. We have been, we have been, you know, "We urge the South African government that he be accorded just treatment." What does that mean? I mean just treatment to these people would be release him immediately, you know, make him president, you know. And we were, we were -- that was not the South African position. So we didn't have, you know, we didn't -- we had kind of a weak, weak position on that. But I mean if you asked us personally, I mean yeah, we thought that -- the future of South Africa is black, we said it, you know. And it, it, you know, 72% of, of the people, you know, cannot, cannot be excluded, you know. I mean we were, we were not in favor of apartheid. And Reagan, we -- it was frustrating, because Reagan app -- you know, came off on being on the white people's side. You know, that's the impression he gave. He was not knowledgeable about the situation, of course. But he -- and then finally he said well, you know, apartheid is a repugnant thing to us, you know, eh said in an interview, you know, but you know, dot, dot, dot. And so of course we were able to say in our answers to these people, "President, President Reagan has termed apartheid as quote unquote, 'repugnant,' so that gave us some ammunition for those letters, you know. But the main event I think that crystallized all of this was Pik Botha, the South African Foreign Minister, I think it was -- I'm trying to think when the date of this visit was, whether it was late '81 or early '82. Anyway, there was, there was a Foreign Minister visit by Pik Botha to Washington. And I think that George Schultz was still Secretary of State. So would have been --

Q: Haig and then --

FROST: No, Haig and then --

Q: Haig was --

FROST: Haig, yeah.

Q: Early Reagan was Haig

FROST: Uh-huh, that's right. So I think that, I think that Hague was still Secretary. I can't remember the date this visit -- but anyway, there was a big, there was a big furor because at the time -- because we, you know, we were welcoming this evil apartheid Foreign Minister for an official visit, which hadn't happened in I don't know how many decades, and there was a lot of strong feeling about it. It felt like we were kind of under siege and so forth. And so one of my assignments in this thing was kind of interesting. My boss, he was kind of -- he was cleverly holding -- we, we would, we would kind of like -- we didn't really have a strong leg to stand on in denying visas to these people and stuff like that. But we kind of, we kind of held the line on -- we were besieged by people. The homeland leaders wanted to go and -- wanted to get visas and legitimate themselves and we would fend them off, and you know, the nuclear scientists and the police officers and, you know, all this kind of thing that made a bad image, you know. And so we were trying to -- and but there were a lot of U.S. government people that wanted to do business in South Africa in certain areas where they had expertise and so forth, you know. And they'd been invited to meet with their counterparts and go out there. And you know, we didn't really any authority to tell somebody from some far-flung department of the U.S. government they couldn't travel to South Africa on official business, you know. But we did *(laughs).* They'd ask us and we'd say no. And, and I remember there was a -- there was a, there was a international police dog competition in South Africa. And police dogs and batons and, you know, you know, you know the image of the evil -- makes you think of Selma, Alabama or something, you know. And that's just not good. And so -- but we couldn't tell some local police organization that they couldn't take their German Shepherd over there to be in a police dog competition, you know. I mean we'd, we'd -- we could tell them no, your local NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) won't like it if you do that *(laughs)* and you're going, you're going to be -- you're going to have a lot of local, you know, they're not going to be happy, you know, it's up to you. But we -- if it was federal we, you know, the director said, "Well, yeah, we turned off the federally owned dog, we told him no, it is against federal policy that, no, you're not going to do. And we won't approve your travel" So he didn't go. So but he had -- there were a list of -- we had this whole list of people, so when this visit happened that wanted, that wanted to have developed relationships with various forms of South African government. And so all of a sudden after we had been telling these people no, or at least let us think about it, I was assigned to run all over town to these various little bureaucratic places and, and, and get a letter, a letter to present to Pik Botha when we got here saying, you know, we'd be happy to -- we'd love to tour South Africa, see your facilities for coal from -- oil from coal or whatever it was or coal slurry or, you know, whatever the little obscure area was. And so these were all little carrots that were harvesting for this visit. So I was the one that ran all over town and got these letters

signed and so forth, and that was my little role in the, in the visit. But the "scope paper" from the -- for the visit, which was written by the late Bob Frasure, I don't know if you remember him, he was the one who was killed in Bosnia. He was Crocker's right hand man on the Namibia negotiations, Bob was assigned to write the classified overview piece for the visit, which was leaked to a group called Trans Africa, which was Randall Robinson, which was I think the brother of Max Robinson, who used to be a news anchor for CNN. And it was black dominated anti-apartheid advocacy kind of group. And it was printed -- it, it was linked to them and it got posted on the front page of The Washington Post right before the visit, you know. And so that was, that was a big -- that was a big controversy, of course. Who leaked that and, you know, you know, it was classified, you know, and -- yeah, well Haig was Secretary. He was mad as hell. Later on there was some event that they wanted -- we wanted to invite Randall Robinson too and Hague said, "No, this guy's a traitor and I won't even talk to him," *(laughs).* So you know, that was, that was, that was a storm of controversy really. It was exciting being kind of part of that, you know. And we had this kind of little team and so forth. And we all liked Crocker, he's a really good guy.

Q: He turned out to be very affective, but he had a -- he was fighting the CIA under a very powerful director, Bill Casey.

FROST: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Q: And Senator Helms and all. And yet, he was able to steer -- a policy which eventually saw the acceptance of a black rule and --

FROST: Yeah. Well, if you, if you sit back and look at it and you know, and, and this was -- at the time the idea of Nelson Mandela didn't, didn't seem to be in the cards in the near future. And if anybody told me that this would happen as soon as it did -- and in a way it was the reaction to our policy from the left or from -- and, and/or Democrats, whatever the anti-apartheid people, that kind of our policy in some ways kind of, kind of paved -- I think it did, you know, even people said it was designed to retard things, the affect was to hasten it. It brought down economic sanctions on them, you know. And, and we opposed that, the State Department, the administration, the U.S. government opposed that, but it happened, you know, while Reagan was president because it was passed over, over the heads of the administration, you know. And it was kind of, it was kind of -- the slope was, was up or down. And politically, the thing is that everything that was good for -- politically good for South Africa, you know, the white government, the apartheid regime, you know, like you know, if we said something that they liked, you know, that got us credit with them, would have the opposite affect with both black South Africans and you know, the anti-apartheid people in the States. And so these things were both pointing in opposite directions, these arrows so to speak, you know. So if we did something good for them it just made our lives harder as far as domestic stuff was concerned, you know. And vice versa. If we, if we issued a condemnation when they massacred, you know, there was the Sharpeville II, they massacred a bunch of people, I think. And maybe that was after I'd moved on, I don't remember. But we criticized that

severely, you know, as was the correct thing to do. And they were mad at us for having done so. So it was, it was a real loggerheads kind of situation.

Q: I mean this must have been your first real exposure to Congress, wasn't it?

FROST: It was.

Q: What were your experiences with Congress?

FROST: Well, I don't know. We had good relationships with of course certain Republicans in Congress. Of course there were certain other Republicans in Congress that went too far in the wrong direction as far as we saw it, you know. But yeah, there was unrelenting, you know -- and, and some of the, you know, there was -- like I say, there was a certain hostility, you know, emanating out of our office. And I was -- I'm the kind of a person who likes to get along with people and talk to them and stuff like that. So I, I -- not that I had a big role in any of this by any means, since I was the Junior Desk Officer, but I was, I was, you know, I was the only person in the office that some people would talk to *(laughs)*, you know. And I had to be careful because I didn't want to -- I didn't want to, you know, overstep my bounds or get in trouble with the hierarchy, but I wanted -- I felt communication was good, you know. So some people would -- they, they knew that -- they knew that I had no power compared to my boss, but he wouldn't even talk to them so he called me, you know. And one of the -- one of the interesting things was that we had somebody -- there was a -- one of the key issues was, like I say, was trade with them and whether they, you know, arms embargo was one thing and other trade was more or less normal. And the people wanted to make it un-normal, you know, that were opposed to us and the administration and the anti-apartheid movement and whatnot. So they would -- there was one issue where some outfit wanted -- some company wanted to sell what were theoretically shock batons to South Africa. And we're not talking about cattle prods in this case. These were these personal security devices, look like a flashlight, and they -- but they had a little kind of thing, medal thing sticking out of one end of them. And if you pressed a button it would deliver, you know, sort of like a gazillion volts at one millionth of an amp-year. So it was, it was not a, a lethal or, you know, even a, you know, a big shock or anything. But the idea was you would kind of stick this person and push the button and it would make him draw back and then you'd collar him and, you know, whatever. And they were supposed to be sold at like Wal-Mart kind of stores and stuff like that. Of course kind of like "Mace", an alternative to pepper spray I guess, you know. But you know, again in a South African context, the police dogs, the shock batons, the water hoses, all this stuff, it looked bad, you know. So we, we had a meeting. I, I attended a -- I set up a meeting where we had these guys -- there were, they -- there hadn't been an export license yet on these things. You know, even an application. But they were testing the waters. They wanted to know whether we would approve the sale of these things to South Africa. And of course we didn't -- we saw it only as a negative public relations thing and it would make us look bad once again. We were -- so we were opposed to it. You know, probably again we were maybe skirting the edge of where we should have been. But anyway, so what happened is that we went -- I arranged a meeting in the Human Rights Bureau of all places. The Human Rights Bureau

Conference is where these guys came in to, to, to give us a presentation on why these things were innocuous and why they weren't cattle prods and they weren't dangerous and they even had some certification from the American Heart Association that even people with pacemakers could be shocked by them and it wouldn't hurt, you know. And we had it tested on us. You know, they stuck 'em -- I, you know, we -- just to feel what they felt like. And it was like a pinprick, you know, a sharp little, you know. So we had these tests done and somebody said, "Yeah well, these things may be innocuous, but they're not going to -- it's not going to look innocuous when we sell them to 'em and it comes to light and it's on the front page of The Washington Post. It won't be innocuous, you know." So the answer is, "We can't say because there's no application, but we're unlikely to approve these, just so you know, so that's our position, you know, that they probably won't be approved." Well, you know, what happened later on, we found out much later that the applications went to -- they did apply for export permits for these things. And the Commerce Department, whose idea was just sell, sell, sell, approved them and didn't tell us. We didn't have a chance to say no, you know. And so we found out later -- it all a sudden came out that guess what? Why are you selling shock batons to South Africa? And so I did -- I did something, I don't think I even asked anyone, I just did it. You know, I thought well this -- we're, we're innocent on this as far as the State Department is concerned and this office is concerned, because you know, we, we did exactly the right thing. So I went -- I leaked this -- I went, I called up my -- a contact I had that it was not a -- that ran a sort of small little newsletter about Africa, a journalist, you know. But he was also -- and also some of the stuff was published in The Washington Post. And so I called this guy up, or maybe he called me, and I said, "You know, let me tell you what happened." And I told him about -- I told him about the meeting and you know, telling him that we wouldn't approve them, you know, and that we had -- we even tested them on ourselves, and in fact they were innocuous but we didn't think that it said a good image that we wanted to portray and, you know, blah, blah, blah.

And so this story, he printed this story in a little publication, it got picked up by The Washington Post. And it was portrayed as sort of like a bizarre meeting in the conference room of the Human Rights Bureau and the State Department where, you know, where State Department Officers had these things tested on them, you know. And, and we actually came out of this thing rather well, people believed us. We said yes, the people, they said, "Well, it's the Commerce Department, you know, that didn't give the State Department to, to vet these things and they shouldn't have done that." And it's, you know, otherwise we would have been blamed *(laughs)*. So it was kind of a great lesson in, you know, kind of behind the scenes maneuvering and nobody, you know, I, I don't know whether they knew I was the source for this or not, but *(laughs)*.

Q: Well, did you get the feeling that, that we had sort of almost a dual policy of, of at least our intelligence operations and all getting very cozy with the apartheid regime? And yet we were opposed to it? I mean did you have sort of a nonfunctional or a bi-functional policy?

FROST: Yeah, it was a, it was a very difficult line to walk. As I say, there was a policy face value, which was nowhere near as, nowhere near as, you know, in bed with him as, as his critics thought. And then there was the, there was the policy seen as more of a cover, you know. And there was -- clearly we were -- it was a much different policy, but you know, but we could -- as I say it was just not politically realistic to ever have the policy that they wanted, that the South African apartheid government wanted us to have, you know. And we did -- we didn't, you know, it was never enough for them. But on the other hand, it was always too much for the other side. So it was, it was -- I mean my, my, my boss described I think in my, in my, you know, performance rating, you know, that I, you know, we were dealing with one of the great moral issues of our time, which was really true, you know. And I was of course sort of, I was the one, I was the one that was asked to become the expert on, on, on apartheid law, you know, and all of the strange stuff went on there. In fact I, I was reading a -- my friend Harry Geisel, I'd say he had a -- I don't know whether -- I can't remember if you were the one who interviewed him, but I read, I read -- I was glancing at his piece in the series and he was, he was Consul in Durbin at the time when I was on the desk. But there was an incident where a guy named Brian Salter who was a Foreign -- I don't know through his career Foreign Service career or not, but he was a tight-end for the Washington Redskins that was -- he was Consul Officer at Cape Town. And he took a bunch of kids from the Cape Town consulate out in the middle of nowhere in Western Cape, South Africa on an outing. And they went into the hotel and they refused to serve him, because he was black. You know, and he was very correct, you know, and said, "Well, I'm a diplomat, here's my diplomatic passport, call Pretoria if you have any questions. But we, you know, you have to serve me, you know." And he was kind of -- he didn't yell at them or cause a scene or whatever. But you know, if that's the treatment that people get --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know. I mean he was kind of a hero to us because it was sort of like he, he held his temper and so forth and he insisted quietly on the, you know -- but of course he hadn't been a diplomat they would have been completely within their rights not to serve him.

Q: Well, I've interviewed black officers who recalled when they were kids with their family traveling through the South --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- and I had I think what's called a green book or something that said where they could eat and where they couldn't eat.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: I mean basically where they could eat, because there were very few places --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: I mean they traveled, they had a -- you know, there was a whole sort of -- I won't call it an underground railroad, but I mean it was essentially a place where blacks could travel in the States and be served in the South. I mean, you know, it was pretty awful.

FROST: Yeah, it was -- and we were always running into these little conflicts and stuff. Because there was a, for example, you know, the International Visitor program that, that we've always had for future leaders and so forth, well they, they were -- there was always a question about who they would, you know, there were a lot of people that we wanted to, that we recognized as future leaders, but you know, the, the South African government did not, you know, see it that way. You know, they were anti-apartheid activists in South Africa and how would we treat them. And there was some, there was a -- there was a young student leader, Sammy something or other, I can't remember. He was a, he was a Jewish -- white Jewish kid, but kind of a student radical type. I wouldn't say Abby Hoffman or something. A little bit like that. And so he was -- it was kind of funny, he was given a -- he, he was -- I think he was a banned person. You know, you had these banning orders where you couldn't meet with more than one person at time and you couldn't be quoted and they couldn't feature your picture in the press and stuff like that. Therefore nobody got -- nobody knew what Nelson Mandela looked like when he was released because you hadn't seen his picture since 1963. But this guy, this Sammy fella, he was selected as one of the grantees, but it was kind of -- it, it was kind of -- he -- I think he, he sort of escaped and he went to, he went to Lesotho and, and, and showed up and said, "I like -- I'd like to go to Harvard now," you know, "I'd like my fellowship please."

And, and it's sort of like there was an embarrassed silence. Well, this guy was kind of a wanted person in South Africa and what we would we do? And U.S. -- so the South Africa government approached us, "Why are you giving scholarships to subversives like this, you know?"

And the American ambassador was -- who was a guy named Herman Nickel who was the political appointee, you know, and he was kind of -- he was a journalist, minor journalist. And he was -- and so he started to race home and the embassy said, "Well, who -- who approved this thing?"

And I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, you were on the committee and you voted for him?" *(laughs)*

"Oh," *(laughs).*

You know, it was a Nieman Fellowship or something or something at Harvard Journalism School or some damn thing. And we, you know, we -- so I think we let him go and just told him, "We don't agree with your government," -- but there was always this kind of stuff going on, you know, because it was like I say, it was just such a, such a difficult line to walk.

Q: Did you get any feel for the -- you mentioned Jesse Jackson, but sort of the black congressional bloc? I mean in a way could you explain to them or did you get involved with them at all while we were doing --

FROST: Yeah, well, we've had kind of a tough relationship with them. It was mainly answering their letters. They had some, they had some pretty big people back then. There was Congressman William Gray from Pennsylvania I think was the Head of the Black Caucus as I recall. And there were some fire breathers and stuff. There was the late Mickey Leland who was from Houston, Texas. And one of the nice things we did for South Africa -- our, our effort was to treat them like a normal country, rather than as a pariah, where we -- where we could. That didn't mean, you know, releasing the arms embargo, blah, blah, blah, but -- and one of the things that we did is we offer -- we gave South Africa Airways a direct flight from Johannesburg to Houston that had to land on this island, Isla del Sal, off the West Coast of Africa to refuel. You know, it was kind of funny because Isla del Sol was I think Portuguese for I think Salt Island or something. But S-A-L also stood for "Suid Afrikaanse Lugdiens," which meant South African Airways in Afrikaans. So it's called South African Airways Island, we always called it that, because that was the only purpose of this island was to refuel these planes because South African Airways would fly to Europe and they couldn't get there from Johannesburg. They had to -- so anyway, they, they flew to Houston, you know, and 19-hour flight, you know, altogether with a refueling stop in Isla del Sal. And, and so Mickey Leland was a fire breathing, you know, guy from Texas. And I remember we went up to -- I, I accompanied -- when I was -- we were all prepping the new ambassador, Herman Nickel, for going out there. Because it took a long time to decide who the ambassador was going to be and we had the poor -- Bill Edmondson was the Carter administration holdover, but he's Career Foreign Service and he was getting all sorts of flack about, "You don't represent the policy anymore, you shouldn't be here, blah, blah, blah. We want an ambassador that represents Reagan, you know, and you were -- you represent Carter." And never mind the fact that he was career, you know.

And so it was -- so I went up --I took the Ambassador-Designate up and we called on Mickey Leland. Of course he was, "I'd be," -- it was kind of funny because I thought, I sort of thought -- he says, "I'd be out manning the barricades if I was South African, you know, I'd be, I'd be protesting, I'd probably be in jail, and I'd be a banned person --" whatever. But that was the time when they were creating separate parliaments for the coloreds and the, and the, and the, and the Indians, you know, trying to bring them in, you know, not for the African set as you were saying, you know, but the other, the other racial groups there.

And so I just think it's kind of funny because I was thinking to myself, "No, you wouldn't, you'd probably be a colored member of Parliament, you know?" *(laughs)*. But he was threatening to lie down on the runway in Houston when this flight landed and *(laughs)*. So it was, you know, I mean we were on speaking terms with a lot of people. It wasn't like they hated us and we hated them all the time, because we weren't as bad as they thought, you know. And -- but you had to be careful not to go too far and, you know, in their direction if you know what I mean, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: There was a certain sympathy that went on that --

Q: Well, did you find when sort of the professional officers in the Bureau of African Affairs looking at South Africa as -- I mean were you getting any feel about wither South Africa?

FROST: Yeah -- yeah. I mean, for example, one -- as I say, you know, we felt that the future -- the future of South Africa was clearly black, it was just a question of when and how, you know. And we all hoped it would be with the least violence possible in a way, in a way that preserved our relationships with these people as they -- and declaring the ANC to be a proscribed terrorist organization was the worst thing that could have happened, and it didn't happen and we helped prevent it. But yeah, I mean of course it wasn't long before, you know, the townships were in flames, you know. I mean they -- two years after I left, you know, it was, it was the beginning of the end. And in -- it was only after I left the office that things headed that far, but yeah, we were -- there was a lot of thought going on about that, you know, in -- at the time.

Q: Well, then you left there when?

FROST: I left there in -- well, I went -- they had a new midlevel Foreign Service Officer course that was four months. And I, I was -- I, I didn't -- I wasn't required to take that, but if I, I was supposed to leave South Africa Desk in, in February and like I say, I loved the job, but was ready to move on and I found out -- I thought gee, if I can take this course I can get back on the summer cycle and I can even leave in February of '83, which would have been, you know, my two-year anniversary, which *was* my two-hear anniversary, take this course for four months and then go out and do a summer assignment. And so I -- the -- I wanted to go -- I'd just fallen in love with South Africa as a country when I went out there on my familiarization trip, you know. And I thought, "I'd like to go out there, but not South Africa itself because I'm sick of dealing with these issues and apartheid directly." So there was the Political/Econ position in Lesotho, which was, you know, surrounded by South Africa. And I was able to get that job because it was one of my office's countries, you know, even though I was still consular cone and, you know. And I really wanted to, to go out there, you know, experience that part of the world for myself. So I managed to get that job. And I also, you know, was -- I was kind of -- this whole experience had turned me into a Political Officer wannabe. Whereas in -- it started out that I just wanted to show I was good enough and equal to everyone and not a second class citizen as a Consular Officer, whatever. And of course I dealt with all the consular issues when I was on the desk, you know, for the whole office, you know, because I was the only one who understood all this stuff -- but I wanted to show that I could be a Reporting Officer too, you know. And Lesotho would give me that chance. So that was my assignment. I went off to this course, which I quite enjoyed.

Q: What did the course do for you?

FROST: Well, you know, I always felt that -- the question is always in Foreign Service Officer's minds is…are we a true profession or not? And of course we always think that -- we've always thought that we are. But my argument was kind of well, you know, I think we're a profession, but it doesn't look good for us as a profession if we don't have any professional training, you know. And, and it's like doctors and lawyers, I mean they just, they just don't hire them and give them a five-week course and send them out to be doctors and lawyers, they have a professional formation. Now, we're not professionals in the same way as we are, but we ought to have some kind of training continuum, which we now have, thanks largely to Colin Powell I think, you know. And this was the first effort. You know, they, they created 50 funded slots for this four-month course, you know. And it was, it was -- there were some flaws in it, you know, and it could have been improved and it probably was during the course that it ran. But the officers put up such resistance, "Oh, it's taking me out of the mainstream, it's, it's FSI (Foreign Service Institute), it's delaying my promotion and, you know, and what about my onward assignment, you know, if I come out of this course off-cycle what the hell do I do with, you know, you know, I'm going to have to spend all my time worry about where I'm going next and I don't," -- and they were forcing people to come back the first time after they got tenure to be in this course. You know, what, you know, even if they wanted -- even if it made sense for them to go onto another overseas assignment they, they, they had to come back and do it, it was mandatory for certain people. Like I say, I'd come in early enough that I didn't have to do it, but -- because I was an FS-3 by then. And but it, you know, I learned quite a bit really, I enjoyed it. It was a nice break. So -- but they finally gave up. They thought well heck, if the officers were -- people who were trying to do this for are fighting us all the way then the hell of it.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And they, they took bits and pieces of the course, which probably even still exist today, you know. It was a political tradecraft and, you know, that kind of stuff that -- Washington tradecraft. And we -- it was all in there, you know. I didn't really need lots of it in the sense that I mean I was an experienced officer and I'd done that -- this job was -- you know, I was such a different person when I left that office in Southern African Affairs.

Q: So then you ended up going through this mid-career course. Where'd you go?

FROST: You mean afterwards?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So that was when I went to Maseru, Lesotho. I did get that job out there. FS-3, Pol-Econ (Political-Economical), international Relations Officer General (IROG) they used to call those positions I guess. And it's kind of funny because I mean it was mainly Political Officer stuff, you know. There was no DCM, and there was a political appointee

ambassador. I would be the only reporting officer there. I write a report, the Ambassador clears it, and off it goes to Washington!

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, and it was a very small post, you know. And I was able to compete equally for this job because it was not called political or political economic/ or -- it was "inter-functional." And so as a consular Officer by cone, which I still was, I didn't have an institutional disadvantage in bidding on it. And since my office had that whole plugged, you know, and I got the Director to recommend me for it, and that's all it took--. I was selected.

Q: Let's talk about Lesotho.

FROST: Mm-hmm.

Q: could you describe where it is and its position when you went there?

FROST: OK, Lesotho was – is—a pretty tiny country. I think it's about the size of Maryland or something, or is it Oregon? I don't know, I'm not even sure. Maybe not Oregon, it's too big. I'll say Maryland, I don't know. It's kind of an island in the sea of South Africa, so to speak. It's completely surrounded by South Africa. It used to be called Basutoland. It's a -- it has a fascinating history, but it -- and when you look at the old maps, like when the British colonies were pink or red. You know, it was this little pink spot in the middle of South Africa there. And it has the highest -- it's a country whose altitude ranges from five to 10,000 feet with 5,000 feet being the lowest. So I think it's the country in the entire world that has the highest low point. The low -- the lowest point in Lesotho is 5,000 feet and it goes up from there, maybe average of 7,500 or something. So it's called the Mountain Kingdom, it's a kingdom. It was part of -- Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, as we call them the BLS countries, were also known as the High Commission Territories, because back when the Union of south Africa was a British dominion and all that, before it became the Republic of South Africa and left the commonwealth or was practically booted out of the commonwealth for apartheid, these territories were ruled from -- they were ruled from Cape Town; they weren't ruled from London. So they were called the High Commission Territories, British protectorates. And Lesotho was kind of, it's kind of -- if you look at the map you can see where Lesotho is because it's all the bad high land, rocky, you know, prosperous farmland around it in South Africa and this bad farmland in on the Lesotho side of the shallow, narrow, and often dry Caledon River that formed the country's northern border. And what happened is that the King Shaka Zulu back in the 1820's when he was raping and pillaging all of Southern Africa, this, you know, a lot of people -- Lesotho was kind of a refuge to get away from him because it was, like I say it was bad land and you could climb up on these plateaus. And there was this plateau outside of the capital, Maseru, which was on -- right on the border, which is another interesting story. And, and it was called "Thabana Morena," which means dark mountain I think in the local language. And there was kind of big massive plateau thing with somewhat steep sides with a top big enough and fertile

enough to grow crops and have a certain level of security against the marauding Zulus. The tribes in southern Africa aren't strictly defined—or at least they weren't back in the early 19th century—there was a certain level of flux and fluidity about tribal identities. The "refugees" living on Thabana Morena came from all directions, but over time they coalesced into a new, or at least expanded, tribe under a single paramount chief and became the basis of a newish tribe that is known today as the Basotho. As the Zulu impis were ultimately defeated and subjugated by the British and the "white tribe" (Afrikaners), the latter kept encroaching on the land they left behind, settling on and farming the good land on the north side of the Caledon River, relegating the Basotho to the poor farmland on the south side of the river in what is now Lesotho. Their leader befriended the paramount chief of the Basotho, and became his foreign affairs advisor. They drafted a letter to Queen Victoria asking if she could take them under her protection: "Madame," the letter read, "we humbly ask to become as a flea in your blanket." he British were used to having to conquer their colonies, and here was a people and its leader who were petitioning her to become a British Protectorate. Howe could they refuse? I could just imagine saying, "Well, this bloody place, you know, it's not worth a plug nickel, no good land, or any minerals, a scummy little place. But gee, we got to take 'em in, you know." So they became part of, you know, part of the British Empire. Thus the Basotho nation was born, evolving into the Basutoland Protectorate, which became today's Kingdom of Lesotho. The paramount chief became King Moshoeshoe I, the Great. So it's legit -- it's not a homeland, but a recognized country like Botswana (Bechuanaland) and Swaziland (also a kingdom still today). And so Lesotho became independent in 1966 and constituted a little island of black majority rule in the middle of what ultimately became the apartheid Republic of South Africa.

Q: What was the government like and the king and all when you went there?

FROST: Well, the British gave Lesotho its independence in 1966. It was to be a constitutional monarchy—sound familiar? The first parliamentary elections were held in 1970. When one of the two main candidates for Prime Minister, Leabua Jonathan, leader of the Basotho National Party (BNP), who I think was already serving as the appointed Prime Minister, realized that the tide of voting was going against him, he staged a coup d'etat, dissolving the nascent parliament and ruled without benefit of further elections from 1970 onwards, and was still in power when I left Lesotho in 1985, an old African Chief/"big man" type. And, and it was -- I mean it was, it wasn't a terribly despotic regime, it was a friendly enough place, you know, but there was an opposition movement that, that had a -- formed a minor league insurgency called the Lesotho Liberation Army, effectively the "military wing" of the original opposition Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). At their origins, the Jonathan's BNP and the opposition BCP were identified with the African National Congress (ANC) and the rival Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) which were vying for the support and loyalty of South African's black population as "liberation movements." So each group had its roots in one of the two principal South African Liberation Movements. There were a couple of South African hotel/casinos in Lesotho, including the Southern Sun—the same ownership as the famous Sun City in South Africa proper. Before I came arrived a small bomb exploded there, allegedly set by the Lesotho Liberation Army. It was pretty clear that the LLA was covertly funded by

South African Intelligence. And, and so it was -- but there was a lot of tension with South Africa, that was for sure. I mean they were, they were under South Africa's thumb. Everything -- all the power came from South Africa, you know, I mean all they had to do was turn off the lights if they wanted to really bring them to their knees, you know? Most of their government revenue came from the Lesotho SA Customs Union, which was actually heavily skewed in Lesotho's favor giving them more of a share than they were entitled to. It was like 70% of the government revenue that came from that. But they were they were at loggerheads with South Africa. Because when I was on the desk, I'm not sure whether it was known yet that I was going there or not, I can't remember, but they, they, they -- South African Armed Forces mounted a raid on Maseru, the capital, you know, where we later lived. And, and they killed 42 people that were and went to people's houses and threw grenades in and machine-gunned the houses where they lived, and you know, it was terrible. Of course we condemned this, you know, naturally. But you know, not strongly enough for a lot of people's liking, you know, at the time. So there was still kind of -- there was the aftermath of that, you know. And in response to that the King went to the UN and demanded, demanded that, you know, that the international community help them out. And so Jonathan's government policy, not that he was a left winger per se, but he thought oh, the international community is the only, the only hope we have in this poor pathetic little place, you know, besieged by South Africa and so forth. So he was going to invite -- he wanted all members of the Security Council to have embassies in Lesotho to protect them, so we had Britain already, France never came, but the Soviets and the, the People's Republic of China opened embassies -- were allowed to open embassies in Lesotho, which was not something that the South Africans liked. But couldn't really do anything about it. And they also brought in the North Koreans for good measure, I guess, the evil, evil North Koreans. So they had these communist embassies suddenly, you know, and, and I remember my house, you could see South Africa from my backyard. It was kind of a down slope to the river, which was the border. And on the other side there were some hills and were in South Africa, you know. Behind our house at the former Taiwan embassy, which looked kind of like a pagoda. And they kicked the poor -- poor Taiwanese got kicked out overnight and you know, they had to go over to South Africa and hang out in a hotel until they could go home, I guess. And then they turned their building over to the "Red" Chinese that came in. And I could take a picture of the Chinese flag, you know, over the Orange Free State, the Afrikaner heartland of the apartheid state, in the background. And so it was kind of a politically interesting time. And they weren't a problem for South Africa because they were such a pathetic little country, but you know, that was the main part of what we did there is kind of manage that conflict a little.

Q: Well, you mentioned there was a story behind the appointment of the ambassador.

We professionals were not involved in this, but we wanted to get the guy out to Pretoria as soon as possible sooner rather than later. The poor outgoing ambassador was a career FSO, but the South Africans considered him "tainted" because he had represented the Carter administration and its very different policy.

Q: This is Bill Edmondson.

FROST: Yes, uh-huh. I mean it was bad for him and bad for everyone, you know. But, but he loyally remained in place until he was finally replaced. But the process was stalled. And it was kind of funny because there was a -- there was a guy that -- I got a letter on the desk claiming that somebody was -- one of the candidates that had been mentioned was, you know, inappropriate -- he was allegedly in league with South African intelligence. He was an inappropriate person to be our ambassador, the "tipster" said, we much later found out that apparently this guy's hobby was collecting Nazi memorabilia so everybody -- there was -- The Washington Post was scouring town trying to find a picture of him in his SS uniform or something, you know. And I just kind of filed this letter away, you know, and then when he didn't get the job I didn't really give it another thought, you know. And he was later appointed to another, another country in the region a step or two removed from South Africa. And Herman Nickel was appointed ambassador to South Africa, like I say. And he was, he was

Q: But a time course was this –

FROST: Yeah, uh-huh, right. And, and it turned out that AF PDAS Frank Wisner's wife was a sister of Nickel's wife—French ladies—not that there was any reason to believe that that had anything to do with the appointment. The neighboring "BLS" countries had each already gotten political ambassadors for the first time. They hadn't even had resident ambassadors in all three countries until the time before this.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So the region's incumbent FSO Ambassadors were all replaced by political appointees.

Q: Well, it was sort of a quiet little spot.

FROST: It was, yeah.

Q: You know, a good political plum.

FROST: Yeah, and they were, they were nice, you know, they were nice climates and, and, and you know, you didn't lack for anything because you had -- it was all came in from South Africa and you could cross the border and shop and stuff like that. Yeah, so we had -- the three guys I remember that when I was on the desk we were prepping these guys to go out there. And there -- they were -- the -- let's see. The -- and of course they were, they were savaged in their confirmation hearings for not being qualified, you know, which you know, was kind of true. And but the one from -- so they were still, they were still in place when I went out to Lesotho. And the guy in Lesotho was a fellow named Keith Brown who I, I really loved this guy and came to admire him greatly -- but I previously met him in Washington.

Q: That it?

FROST: Yes.

Q: We have a book, put up his -- made a book out of interviews done.

FROST: Uh-huh. And he -- unfortunately I went out in July of 1983 and he left in December of that so I only really worked with him for less than four months I guess, or five months. And he was super. His approach -- he had no, I -- you know, the others were less successful I think. Not -- but they weren't, I don't think, disastrous or anything. Like the fellow in Botswana was a big game hunter and he was complaining well, I can't even go near a game park, you know, it'll be on the front page papers of the and *(laughs)* forget that, I'm not having fun out here, you know, I thought I could do that out here, go hunt big game, but no, I can't even --

Q: No.

FROST: I dare not, you know. And then the guy, the guy in, in Swaziland was best known for being married to the daughter of the founder of Gerber Baby Foods. But while Keith Brown didn't have anything on paper that qualified him to be ambassador to anywhere, let alone a small African country, he did a really professional job. And I got along with him well and I loved working for him. But they replaced him with a second political appointee named Shirley Abbott, a man named Shirley who was an optometrist from El Paso, Texas who had owned this big company that made and sold millions of pairs of eyeglasses to the DOD (Department of Defense) for soldiers. And you know, he was a true Reaganite, whereas Keith Brown was more like a George H.W. Bush type moderate Republican, such as don't exist much anymore. And Shirley Abbott had a different, more ideological, approach whereas Keith Brown was so very professional. You know, he just kind of -- I think Keith was successful at everything he did in life and he kind of sat back for a while and watched how his professionals worked and figured it out and, you know, he was involved in stuff and he didn't micromanage and he listened to us and, and just the -- and all the Brits and other people around were just like -- they had no idea that he wasn't career, because he just -- just his approach was so professional. Shirley Abbott was kind of like, you know, Ronald Reagan was sort of like Reagan himself, you know "I'm not a president, but I play one on TV, that kind of thing. Sort of like, you know, why do it the professional way when you can do it the amateur way?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And that's the way, that's the way Abbott was too, you know. So he thought we should go off to fight world Communism together with the apartheid republic, you know, and they should be an ally the same sense that Germany or France -- or Britain, you know. And fight communism together and the ANC was all communist inspired anyway and, you know. He was not on board with the policy. He was to the right of it, which made life difficult for one like me who truly believed in the policy, you know.

Q: Well, how could this work from your point of view? I mean could you talk to him or just sort of keep him in line or --

FROST: Well, I, you know, I -- it was frustrating. I did -- I wrote all the reports, I did all the reporting. And I used to joke about the only, the only country they're going to let me be Econ Officer in is a country where they're -- they don't have an economy. Lesotho was kind of like that. The main export was people -- black mineworkers to South Africa, you know. And so but I did all the reporting and I loved it and all the contact work and stuff. And I was already -- plus I was already established when he came, you know. They had a chargé in between because I was kind of too junior. They didn't want me to be in charge of the place for very long, which is fine, you know. So they brought in a surplus guy who'd been DCM somewhere else, you know, an old Africa hand. And we got along really well, you know. So I was kind of established when he got there, you know, as the, the Political\Economic Officer. I did the consular work too, you know, 10% of my time, you know. And so I mean Shirley was a friendly guy, very -- like Reagan himself very avuncular and so forth. But I mean, I -- it didn't take me long to realize that problem was that I wanted to extend for a third year and I had like one month to put in my application for that after he was there. So we got along fine and I asked him if I could extend, he said oh, not a problem, yeah, it's great, and we're getting along fine, everything's working, you know. But I don't know, there's -- there were a lot of tensions, you know, because he took a very unorthodox approach, you know. And, and it was hard to tell him that his ideas were very unusual. The officers in Southern African Affairs who I used to work with would chuckle at some of the odd policy things he wanted to do. However it wasn't funny when you were the one who had to try and save him from himself.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- if you're out there.

Q: Can you give any examples of where he was sort of off?

FROST: Yes, well here -- there's one big one. There's one big one. The government had a weekly English language paper. A lot of the articles came from South Africa and other places and stuff. But so he got all upset one time because I think that -- remember the Sharpeville II thing I mentioned, I guess that happened after I went to Lesotho now that I think about it, where they all of -- it was an anniversary celebration of the famous Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 and they were protesting. And they, they shot some -- it was like, sort of like, you know, happened again, and they shot a bunch of protestors, you know, stuff like that. And so Reagan was asked about this, you know, and sort of lamely said, "Well, you know, they were protesting I understand," you know. While he didn't say they deserved to be shot in the back, I mean that's the way it was portrayed by the media. And that was a very eminent South African journalist called, called Percy Qoboza who wrote for the -- I think it was The Sowetan, which was a black newspaper in Soweto in South Africa. And he, he was the former Neiman Fellow at Harvard and all this stuff. And, and so, so I think he, he made this -- he -- this article appeared in South Africa, said, you know, and, and quoted Percy Qoboza saying, you know, "Ronald Reagan is a racist.

That's all there is to say about that." And of course that was a firestorm of criticism from, you know, the right in the US.. And, and, and this was printed in South Africa and the story was picked up by this local newspaper. And Shirley was livid, said, "Well, look at The Lesotho Weekly -- look at -- look at this article, you know, they're, they're insulting MY PRESIDENT!"

And I said, "Well sir, you know, you should see the Times of Zambia every single day." Stuff like this, or much worse. And this same article was permitted by our friends across the border to be published a newspaper with an almost 100% black readership.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: It was printed in The Sowetan, you know, that's where this article comes from. So I mean it's just kind of the way the press is, you know, particularly in this country and in this region and, you know, blah, blah, blah. I tried to sort of -- but you know, he was just determined that he was going to, you know, this government can't -- it's a government paper and they shouldn't -- and, and he took the paper and cut this article out and said, "Here's The Lesotho Weekly without this article. You know, if it hadn't been there, no problem. But they can't insult my president like that! We got to do something. So what do we do?" You know, the question is -- and I mean nobody else would have, you know, thought of this, you know. I mean no sane, you know -- and so -- what he came up with is the queen was about to go to the US for the first time on an International Visitor grant and…

Q: The Queen of --

FROST: The Queen of Lesotho. And the king and queen were like figureheads, they had no power, you know.

Q: How many wives did the king have? Only one?

FROST: Only one, yeah, uh-huh. Some people had up to four wives. You know, they were -- I guess maybe they were Muslims or something, but he only had one wife. And she was seen shopping at the local supermarket pushing her own cart and, you know. But they lived in a palace that looked kind of like Ramada Inn and it was kind of this modern building. And but, you know, he -- they were -- I don't know how -- they -- I'm not sure that you would say they were beloved, but they were at least respected. And they were a whole lot better than the Prime Minister and his inner circle, who were definitely NOT loved. But the people liked them. And so she was going to go on this trip. I don't know if she'd ever been to the States before, but I don't think so. . So, so, so his reaction was that they were going to, they were going to cancel the queen's visit, and tell her it was an inopportune time for her to come -- or something like that. And so my next door neighbor was the PAO who was a former Peace Corps volunteer in Lesotho, probably spoke Sesotho better than any living American I would guess, who was married to a girl about half -- lady about half his age that he met when he was a teacher in her village. And the

village was the royal village where the king and the queen had grown up. And so this guy was an expert in the country and he was plugged in. Sometimes he and his wife would go to dinner at the palace with only the king and the queen and stuff like that, you know, fantastic, you know, contacts and knowledge this guy had, you know. So he comes knocking on my door on Saturday morning, he's like, he's like virtually apoplectic. Said, "Do you know what the ambassador wants to do? They want to cancel the queen's visit! He wants to cancel the queen's visit, you know, and what a disaster this would be!" He was like, you know, "This will set the relationship back 20 years! Nobody will understand. It's just terrible! We – we've got to do something!" *(laughs)* you know? So, OK, you know.

Q: So how did this evolve?

FROST: So I said, "Go talk to the Ambassador" I've -- I said, "Look, you know, I've talked to the him this already but I, I've made no headway," you know, told him about the paper with the article cut out, stuff like this. And so, "I said my piece and it hasn't worked, so the ambassador's over there working, so you know, I, I support you, but you know, I can't really do anything at this point. So why don't you -- why don't you go over there and talk to him and see if you can convince him to back off on this bad idea, you know?" And so he did.

And I think the ambassador realized that, "Oh, I've made a big misstep here, you know, but then he thought, "Well, so what can I do?" you know. And I mean I think, I think we might have already sent a cable saying we were doing this, you know. Whenever I knew I couldn't convince him to back off on one of his colossally bad ideas, I would offer to write the "from Ambassador" cable to Washington asking permission to do it and almost make it sound reasonable, not as crazy and ridiculous as it might otherwise have seemed, put the best face on it, as it were. And so I -- I think maybe the cable had gone out saying we were going to do this and nobody was squawking, you know, until the PAO raised the alarm and stuff. And so, and so I think the, I think the ambassador probably thought, "Oh crap, this is -- I've, I've stepped in here. I've got to do something, you know." So what do you do, you know? Sort of like -- so what they ended up doing is that they brought him back for consultations to, "to review U.S. policy toward Lesotho. But we didn't really have a policy toward Lesotho. Nobody had ever even given it a thought, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: It's just kind of -- you know, so it was -- it's – but that satisfied him. And I had no idea, he never told me what happened on this visit, never told me, you know. And I didn't ask and I didn't rally want to know -- but anyway, so I don't know how that all worked out.

Q: Well, did she go on the trip? Did the queen go on the trip?

FROST: Yes, she did, uh-huh, yes, she did. So that was, that was fine. She went and -- but I don't know – but to make a long story short, as far as my relationship with him, I

don't think it was ever quite the same Who knows, maybe he went back to Washington and blamed the whole thing on me? Subsequently there was a routine scheduled inspection that came out and they, they said really good things about my reporting and such. I was unfortunately gone when the inspection occurred, which was turned out was probably a mistake, but you know, he said go ahead because I'd already booked a cruise and then the inspectors had changed their dates and I didn't want to lose all the money I had paid to go on this cruise to Greece. But the Ambassador said, oh, I can handle these guys, it's not a problem, don't worry, just go ahead and go. But I found when I came back that they had recommended, as they had done for Swaziland before that, that the FS-3 Political/Econ Officer be replaced by an FS-2 with the title of DCM. You know, which kind of makes no sense because the AID Director was Senior Foreign Service and AID was the big power in this country anyway, you know. You know how it is normally, when they, when they do that it was, it was probably a slap at him, you know, the fact is why do they need a DCM in this place? They're doing just fine with an FS-3 --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- Political Officer when Keith Brown is there and, you know, it wasn't a problem. From what my communicator buddies told me, it seemed as if he really wanted to get rid of me. But there really weren't two jobs there, and you can't double encumber a position. And of course if I was allowed to serve out the third year of my tour there would be no point because it would be almost time for Abbott to leave by then, anyway. Abbott told me I could stay, but I wasn't sure if the system would let me, and my heart really wasn't in it. So I decided to request a curtailment, so that my position could be eliminated and replaced by an FS-2 level DCM. They sent out an old, very long in the tooth FS-2 who was desperately trying to make FS-1 before his TIC expired, for an interview. I guess they Washington wanted to make sure that he and Abbott could get along first before they assigned him. And I didn't really want to work for him, you know. There was an awkward moment. Lesotho's first elections in 15 years—only the second in their history—were scheduled in just a few weeks, in September. Abbott didn't have a clue about the political situation in the country. I have been reporting on the planned elections since the interim period before Abbott, but he probably didn't pay too much attention to my cables. And there was hardly any time for the DCM to be to learn anything—and I sure didn't want to be the one to teach him. And so they wanted me to stay -- you stay just a few more weeks until the elections and do a wrap-up report and then, then you can go, you know. And I felt like saying, "Well, the hell with you guys, I'm just," -- talk about feeling used and abused. No, you know. I didn't want to do that. But it turned out that, that Jonathan pulled the plug on the elections shortly thereafter—not enough opposition candidates paid the deposit to run, so they were cancelled and didn't happen. n so no report would be required. So that was fine. So that worked out fine. But you know, so I left and it was kind of an interesting -- I'll always remember this. When I was, you know, we flew in and out of Bloemfontein, because the, the runway in, in Lesotho at the airport had a little, little hill on it. So you know, and it was Lesotho Airways, they had one plane only I think. And, and so I would always, I always -- I'd take SAA -- drive over to Bloemfontein, which is an hour and a quarter and take the -- take South African Airways to Johannesburg and then onward to Europe or the States or

wherever. And so when we left the country it was September 11th, 1985. And the ruling National Party of South Africa was just finishing up their annual congress in Bloemfontein. And I have a daughter that was born in Bloemfontein when I was out there, by the way, my first child. That was, that was interesting. And, and so on the plane with us -- to Johannesburg with us was virtually the entire Cabinet of South Africa. This was 1985 when the townships were burning, you know. And it was, it was, you know, the, the handwriting was really on the wall, you know, and the apartheid regime seemed under siege. I just remember on this flight I recognized all these Ministers because when I'd been on the desk I knew who they all were and, you know, might have even met one or two. And I just knew -- so I was talking to my wife about...you know, that old guy over there is Minister of Agriculture, a real idiot, and this guy is blah, blah, blah, you know, I was pointing them all out. And they were, they were all kind of drinking beer and, and, and, you know, it was kind of a festive mood on this plane. And I had, I just thought to myself, "This must have been what it was kind of like in a Fuhrer bunker."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: I really had this, this flash of -- it's a memorable moment for me. I thought this is, this is -- this comes on my departure from after being involved in this region, you know, for, for, for almost five years, you know. Sort of a bookend…

Q: Yeah.

FROST: I'm leaving and, and, and it, it's like a symbolic thing, you know, the coming end of an era…you know.

Q: during the time you were in Lesotho, what were relationships like with South Africa?

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Q: How much contact with the people?

FROST: Quite a bit. Yeah, uh-huh. I had -- it was very -- it was an open society and people were friendly and I didn't speak the language, you know, which would have been nice if I had. But yeah, I had, I had lot of friends and contacts there, you know, and I was -- I felt that -- and I of course had this PAO that was just super, you know, the one I mentioned, you know, the ex-Peace Corps volunteer. And you know, my British, my British counterpart and I worked very closely together. Like, like I say, it was kind of interesting because was this great interest in this country. There was very little except as a sideshow to South Africa as far as back in the State Department or anything. But I mean, you know, it wasn't in the news, you know, so you could really do reporting -- you reporting was, you know, there was no Internet then, of course, but you know, you had to go out and talk to people, you know, so you could report on what was going on, try to figure it out, you know. It was a strange kind of culture in some ways, you know, westernized as people were, you know. There was a police commissioner told me about apparently there was some guy that, he had -- he had four wives and he had four houses

out in -- some rich guy and he had four houses outside of town and one for each wife or something apparently. And, and I guess he caught -- he caught one of his, one -- some guy with one of his wives with another man and took him up on the --chased him up on the roof of his house and they were squabbling, and apparently he cut off this guy's testicle. And then, and then apparently the, you know, I, I'd heard about this incident, the police commissioner was telling me about it. I said, "Yeah! Well, you know, it was interesting because they had a court case, it was like a civil suit, you know," which turned out what is the fair value of a testicle? We laughed and laughed about it, you know. But it was, it was trying to figure out what was going on here, you know, it's really hard, you know. And, and but -- and like there was a, there was a Lesotho Evangelical Church I think it was kind of Lutheran denomination there had a, they had a weekly newspaper, which was in Sesotho. And my British colleague, somehow he found the money in his budget, he paid somebody to translate the weekly -- their weekly paper into English, handwritten, you know, translation of this paper. And he would, he would, you know, give me a copy every week so I could read stuff in there that was not in the government weekly, you know, in, in English, you know. And they were kind of anti-government a little bit, you know, and so it was trying to figure out what was going on in this country. And so it was great fun, you know, to sort of be, be -- and then they -- at the time I -- I did the first report on what became the huge Lesotho Highlands Water Project, because South Africa, all the rivers, the Orange River that flows into South Africa and its catchment area is in high altitude Lesotho. All of water flows into South Africa eventually, but in the wrong place, it goes out in the Orange River towards the Atlantic Ocean. And this water was desperately needed up by Johannesburg in the, in the industrial heart of South Africa. So what actually happened is there was this huge project, a huge engineering project to dam these rivers up in Maseru, Lesotho and, and to pump that water as much as they could by gravity flow and to send it up north to South Africa where it could actually be used, rather than in the semi-desert in the --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- where, where it left the country in the first place. So that was -- Brown & Root was there and, you know, I talked to the guy from Brown & Root and reported on this project and, you know, ultimately became a reality. You know, and, and -- then I had a buddy that was an Irish AID contractor that was kind of the, the guy that wrote the budget for the Finance Minister and would always drop, would drop me a copy of the budget -- an advanced copy of the budget for the next year before it came out so I could report on it, you know scoop everyone *(laughs).* You know, it was just kind of, it was, it was just, you know, it was great fun, you know. And you know, I, I enjoyed writing my reports and, you know. And the ambassador said he -- so I think he was right when I think about it. He, you know, he said, said, said, "Greg, you know, I don't know whether you really are cut out to be a DCM. You're not really into management, are you?" He said, "You, you're more of a -- with your reports and everything, you're more of an artist than you know, a boss or a manager or something like that."

Q; Yeah.

FROST: And he was, said it as a friendly way, you know, and when I look back on it I thought well, maybe he was kind of right, you know. I --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, and, and, and you know, maybe that's -- maybe that's purely the only reason that he thought he needed a DCM. I don't know. But if he'd been competent he wouldn't have needed one, you know, that's the thing. I don't know how that FS-2 ever did with the -- with the Senior Foreign Service AID Director though, or with Abbott for that matter..

Q: Well --

FROST: You know, how's he going to supervise her? I don't know.

Q: Well, this is a good place to stop.

FROST: OK.

Q: But where did you go, and this was '86, was it?

FROST: Right.

Q: Where'd you go?

FROST: Well, I had -- because I had, you know, again I missed the summer cycle because I left in September, you know. July was too late to be looking for assignments. So anyway, I thought well, OK, I proved I can do "substantive" work, I've been Political/ Econ Officer and basically I've been successful. I drafted a very good evaluation for myself before leaving and Abbott didn't change a word of it, so I got promoted to FS-2 right after I left. So I thought I'd go back to my Consular roots and look for an in-cone assignment. So I went to Tijuana NIV (Non-Immigrant Visa) Chief via Spanish language training. So I left in September and went out to Tijuana in March after a few months of Spanish.

Q: OK, then we'll pick it up then.

FROST: OK.

Q: Great. All right --

Today is March 30, 2012.

FROST: I'm going to make a couple of alterations about my experiences with political appointees --

Q: All right. Please do.

FROST: -- based on -- remember on Lesotho. We talked about Keith Brown and the guy that followed him and so forth?

Q: Yeah. Yeah, what was your impression?

FROST: Well, you know, it's interesting. I -- as I think I've said earlier, I worked for two political appointees in Lesotho, Keith Brown whom you know, and Shirley Abbott, whom you probably don't know. And neither one of them had any real particular qualifications to be ambassador anywhere, let alone to a small black African country. But Keith Brown did a really good job I thought and was a great, great person to work for. I'd work for him anywhere, any time. He was so very professional in his approach. Respected and loved him really. Shirley Abbott was a little bit different kettle of fish. He was a nice guy in the mold of Ronald Reagan and sort of like, you know, I'm not the president but I play one on TV kind of thing, I mean very avuncular and friendly and you know, almost gregarious and so forth. And, and likeable. But you know, he was kind of a bumbler and he, he was to the right of the administration on South Africa policy at the time, which was in some people's books really saying something. And he really probably, you know, wasn't a good candidate to do it. And I guess he was kind of maybe insecure about himself, you know, because -- whereas Keith Brown just let us professionals just do our jobs and was interested in what we did and involved and didn't micromanage, Shirley Abbott, you know, I think maybe was just a little insecure in, in being in charge of us and being, being the ambassador and got a little, you know, prickly about his prerogatives and thus so. So -- and -- but the bottom line is that, you know, in the footnote of when Southern African history is written in the 1980's, which I guess it's probably already being written, Shirley Abbott is only a footnote. There's not a whole lot of damage he could do to United States interest in Lesotho no matter how bad or incompetent or off the wall he may have been. I mean it was just fine, you know, in terms of the big picture, so to speak. And but the other thing I learned was that, you know, if you stake your life and career on beg making ambassador to cap off your career in some little backwater like Lesotho, it's probably a false priority because a good political appointee like Keith Brown or a not-so-good one like Shirley Abbott could come along and grab it instead, and none of the ten career FSOs who probably wanted that job and were very well qualified for it got it because it wasn't available. And so it's kind of the luck of the draw, I guess. But it was just an interesting, interesting life experience really, working for two very different political appointees in a row. By the way, when Abbott's wife died, I reached out to him and ended up writing her obituary for State Magazine. I had learned to put things in their proper context by then.

Q: OK, well you're off to a major working post, Hermosillo.

FROST: No, this was Tijuana. Hermosillo comes later. That's on my list but we haven't gotten there yet *(laughs).*

Q: OK. What was -- you were there from when to when?

FROST: Well, I was there from March '86 to June '88, so just slightly over two years.

Q: Who was the Consul General and what were you doing there?

FROST: Well, let's see. The Consul General was a fellow named Bob Emmons who was an old consular hand from, you know, way back. And I was in charge of the Non-Immigrant Visa Section there. Tijuana had a very large Immigrant Visa Section as well and a decent sized Non-Immigrant Visa. Our consular district was only the two states of Baja California and Baja California Sur. But you know, it covered a stretch of the border, the whole border of California and a tiny little slice of Sonora opposite Yuma, Arizona.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so it was kind of the, kind of the last stop on the way to Los Angeles, so to speak, for a lot of people. And it was also -- it was kind of California's consulate, because a lot of the immigrants were already living there illegally when they came down for their -- to get their immigrant visas. And any given visitor visa applicant could a been illegally in the States as -- and frequently as shortly as 15 minutes ago *(laughs).* So it was kind of a -- it was not -- I kept telling the Junior Officers that worked there, you know, it's -- this is not a normal Foreign Service post. You can, you know, go to a Major League (San Diego Padres baseball game for gosh sakes. We went to games even when we were Duty Officer.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: We had a duty cell phone, which was pretty unusual in the 1986 timeframe, and a beeper that was connected to the U.S.\California telephone and beeper system. Basically, if we needed to get back across the border, like say if you were Duty Officer, you just jumped in your car and drove down the freeway and there you were. So you know, it was -- I said, "Where else can you be Duty Officer and be attending a Major League baseball game, you know?"

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Go to movies that were -- we went to church in Downtown San Diego. But the border was just a fascinating phenomenon. That made it really different.

Q: All right, well tell -- let's talk about the work. You were doing non-immigrants. Who were your clientele?

FROST: Well, the sort of bread and butter were just the, the local Mexican residents of the border zone that wanted to go over and shop or go to a baseball game or visit friends and relatives or any of the other stuff that you do in Southern California or the immediate San Diego area.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And so they were basically, you know, border crossers. They usually weren't going further field in the States than, than just across, maybe Los Angeles, you know, perhaps, probably inevitably since it's Los Angeles. But they, they weren't -- they weren't international travelers. And you didn't need a real -- you didn't need a lot of money to do that.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know. So I mean our standards were low in that sense, you know. But it, it was hard to know -- some people, you give them a visa, they skip to L.A., you never see them again. Others are perfectly content where they are, they, they go -- you get -- we had these like young girls -- a lot of the people were fairly recent migrants from the interior of Mexico who were making their way north. Now is, is this the last stop or is it just a stepping-stone to Los Angeles? And you know, it's really hard -- it was really hard to tell because some of these people, you know -- generally speaking if a person -- these were ten-year border-crossing card/visas that we were giving.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: Generally speaking, anybody that had one of those for ten years, five or ten years without having it canceled or their card shredded if they had a card, you know, was probably not violating it, because --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- if you're really up to something sooner or later you'll get caught and, you know, they'll catch you, you know, going to work or something. And then you, you get canceled. But so a lot of these people were young girls and, you know, they, they just wanted to take their extra, their $20 a that they got in disposable income and go buy some cheap blue jeans at K-Mart or something like that, so you know. That was the largest thing. The other thing was people in California who were third country nationals and who basically needed to switch from student visa to temporary worker or from tourist to student or something like that, and so they hopped down to Tijuana, have a nice seafood dinner, and then go into the consulate the next day and apply for a visa. Of course the stakes were pretty high because if they, if they don't get -- if they're not legal in the States and you deny them a new visa then what do they do? They're trapped on the "wrong" side of the border. And their whole life is often in California. So that's the thing, you know. And a lot of times they don't think. Because back then anyway, this is pre 9/11, all you needed to cross the, you know, you didn't even need a -- if you're a U.S.

citizen you'd drive up to the gate "Citizenship?" US "Where you going?" Home. "What have you been doing? Fishing. And they just sort of listen to your accent, check your trunk to make sure you're not bringing any illegals or obvious drugs or any contraband, and they check your license plate probably in what, what, what would pass for a computer back then I guess, and then just *(swooshing sound)*, you're through. But you didn't necessarily have to a show a document.

So a lot of these people, you know, they got American buddies, "Oh, let's go down to Tijuana and have a -- you get a lobster dinner for ten bucks," you know, and maybe have a few beers. So you go down there, come back, citizenship and the guy has a thick South African and they ask his citizenship he says "American," that the beginning of his troubles.

"Doesn't sound American to me.'

And turns out he has a South African passport in their, in their back pocket and an expired tourist visa but he's not a tourist anymore, they're living in L.A. And it's sort of like, "I got to get back."

"Why?"

"Well, my house, my car, my job, everything," you know. Because they're non-Mexican Anglos who have gotten away with overstaying in the US with no problems….
Q: So what happened?

FROST: -- Well immigration would turn them back so they come in and apply for a visa. And I, I invented a name for these people. I called them "beached whales" because they were, they were kind of like beached whales. They were, you know, fish out of water so to speak. And well, I mean there are other ways to get across the border than with a visa, you know, like a coyote, you know, in somebody's trunk or sneak across or whatever. But these were, these people would look sort of out of place, you know, running around in the canyons, you know, trying to evade the border patrol and so on and so forth. So what do you do?

And I kind of had this humanitarian policy toward them, because I -- I mean, they literally just had the shirt on their back and that was all. You know, they hadn't prepared for anything other than a weekend at most, you know, down there. And there they were stuck, you know. And they hadn't planned on going home to Britain or France or Germany or South Africa or wherever they're from, you know. And so what I would do, usually I'd let them stew out there for two or three days until they realized that things were serious, you know, and this was not a given, you know. And then I would say, "Look, here's the deal. I'm going to give, you know, check your record," make sure they don't really have anything adverse against them, you know, in terms of, you know, passing the, whatever the computer screen was at the time. And I'd say, "Look, OK, here's the deal. I'm going to give you a single entry transit visa, you know, and, and you go back to the gate. And if you can convince the inspector that you're going to really

pack up your stuff and clear out and fly back to Australia or wherever, you know, within 72 hours he'll let you in and, you know, hopefully you'll do that," you know. "But if not, if he, if he stamps canceled all over your new visa, well I've done the best I can for you and that's his prerogative and it may well happen, in which case you're just going to have to, you know, go -- probably catch a flight to Mexico City and from there Australia to there and get somebody to bring you money and clothes and whatever else you need" *(laughs),* you know. Because I'm not going to, you know, that's just the best, best I can do. And I never really heard much about what happened to these people.

But I got a call from the Australian Consul in L.A. one time and, and -- who I didn't know -- and asked me to handle this stranded Australian down there. He thought he was a good guy and he had a girlfriend in L.A. "I really think he's going home," you know. So you know, he won't -- "If you could help him out." So I gave him the usual transit visa. Consul called me again a few days later, said, "This guy lied to me. He, he -- turned out he, he even laughed at me, said he tricked me into helping him get back into the States. He wouldn't -- had no intention of going home. And I really apologize." *(laughs)* . "And I want to invite you up to my house for the weekend in L.A.," which I actually went one time. I went to -- I got a ticket to the -- Fernando Valenzuela, the pitcher for the Dodgers, he was a Mexican national hero, would always come down for his work visa in Tijuana. We'd always -- the FSN's would always arrange to -- we'd, you know, have an autograph section with him where people could talk to him and, you know, he brought little gifts, baseballs and stuff, you know. Anyway, so I knew, I knew, I knew his agent. And his agent said, "Oh, if you ever need tickets to a Dodgers game just let me know because Fernando has, you know, eight complementary tickets to every game so, you know, just give me a call." And so I, so I arranged -- my wife and I went and stayed the weekend with this guy and, and he had like a 12-year-old son and we all went to the Dodgers game, thanks to Fernando Valenzuela. And it was quite a, quite a thing. So anyway that was, that was a nice, nice little thing.

Q: Yeah. Well, did you get much telephoning from people in the States saying, "God, let my son-in-law or whoever it is," in other words, trying to get these people --

FROST: Oh sure, yeah. But it was relatively low pressure because, like I say, there are other ways to go. And you know, we didn't probably get the very worst applicants, you know, because of the fact that you might as well invest your time and money directly in a in a coyote if your visa chances are really bleak. So I mean, the worst applicants of course come from the interior, you know. And, and we would get these families that would come up though, it was kind of heartbreaking in a way, where they claimed to have a close relative, son, brother, whatever, in L.A., illegally of course almost always, that was dead or dying, you know, like hit by a bus or, you know, they were about ready to pull the plug because they were on life support because they had kidney failure or something, you know. They would have some letter, like usually a letter from a funeral home and somebody in L.A., you know, vouching or attesting for this. There was one particular funeral home back in L.A., and I used to joke about, that this was like an industry up there. And their motto, they had a little illustration of and umbrella or something that said, "Into each life a little rain must fall."

And so this was, you know, yes, their so and so, the brother's, you know, funeral's tomorrow, whatever, you know. And they -- so these people come up form the interior. And they were -- you could see they were really grief stricken, you know, a lot of them. There was somebody that had died, you know. But then you look at them. You got the -- you like -- you got the, you know, 55-year-old parents. You think, "Well, these guys look kind of out of place in East L.A. You know, they never probably even thought of going to L.A. until now, you know. So why should they stay there?" But on the other hand, they don't really have --in traditional Consular Officer thinking, you know, "What are their ties to, to Mexico will to make them come back?" But on the other hand, the 22-year-old brother of the dead or dying guy, you say, "Well gee, he's just the replacement. He's going to take over the guy's job probably and he'll never come back." You know, so kind of we did this triage with them, you know. And the thing was they had no passports or really any even decent identification. So we were kind of taking their word for who they were. They had some tattered piece of paper from their village or something attesting to who they were, you know. And so we'd given them these -- called -- they called permisos (permissions) in Spanish, but these waivers basically, you know. Just a little, a sheet of paper typed on it, you know, little envelope addressed to the Immigration Officer. This guy's, you know, requesting a waiver of passport and visa for this guy to see his son buried in L.A. and whatever, handed him the envelope. Again, if they got through, that was fine. If they didn't, well, we weren't going to intervene or anything.

So that was a fascinating. And we would also give group waivers to busloads of Mexican kids, class trips and so forth that would go over to Magic Mountain or Knott's Berry Farm or Disneyland or somewhere in Southern California, some tourist destination, forty kids from some school.

Q: That's probably a pretty safe group. I mean the kids aren't going to --

FROST: Yes Immigration Officers just go on the bus and count heads, you know. And now, all this is pre 9-11. It's all changed now, mind you. I haven't been -- I haven't spent much time down there lately, but I know it has. And we -- I think we did about as many -- I want to say we did as many -- covered as many people with these one, one-time "permisos" than we did actual visa applicants. We did about -- we did in the 40,000 range of applicants a year.

Q: How did you find the officers working under you? This is -- can be quite a strain if you're --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- in there. How did you find it?

FROST: Well, I don't know, it, I was just -- it was kind of high volume and very low tech of course in those days, you know. What we did -- we, we had theater tickets, you know, and that's how we went out on the street and stapled then to the passports, and that's how

we determined their places in line and who got interviewed. But we -- basically, you got there by ten you were interviewed that day. And if you were issued you'd get your passport back with a visa in it four o'clock. So you know, it was efficient in that way. But it was -- it just wasn't all that much fun, you know. Again, the stakes weren't that high because if somebody was refused and they really wanted to go badly enough they'd find another outlet, you know. And so it wasn't that high a pressure. But it, it was just kind of repetitious and boring for the most part. And -- but they were good officers and, and we still had fun. There were only two officers with me-- it wasn't a big section, it was just me and two officers. And I spent my time at the window interviewing right beside them most of the time. Except we didn't have windows, we just had this counter with no glass. You know, the security, I used to joke about the "ballistic plywood" that we that we were sitting behind, you know.

Q: Did you live in Tijuana?

FROST: Yes, we lived -- we all lived in Tijuana. It used to be in the old days I'm told that actually you could live in the States if you wanted to. And you even had a housing allowance where you could -- and there were people that would, that would buy a house in, in San Diego or -- and I guess it was Chula Vista, which is the main border town there, part of San Diego. You buy a house over there while you were doing your tour and then you'd, then you'd keep it and rent it out and you'd have a home there. You know, in Southern California. Some people did that apparently in the past, but then they stopped that. So basically you could live in the States if you really wanted to, but you got no money. You'd have to pay for your own housing. And so everybody who lived in -- so we lived up the hill from the consulate, just a short drive, you know, a quarter of a mile or half a mile or less.

Q: Did you have much contact with Mexicans?

FROST: Well, not a whole lot. I mean the Consul General did most of that representation stuff. And then of course when there was a large ACS, American Citizen Services -- not large, but there was a chief and two officers doing that, you know. So you know, with people being thrown in jail and stuff like that. So we, we didn't -- no, we didn't have that much -- and you know, you could hobnob as much as you want to, but on the other hand it just meant that you'd get people, you know, kind of like -- it wasn't like Nigeria, but it was the same thing. If you hobnob with people, you know, you reap the whirlwind the next day at work when they all – However, I was an active parent at the little preschool my elder daughter attended. I even rented a costume to be in the Christmas Pageant the parents put on for the kids. And the next year I got to be Santa—a gringo Santa Claus!

Q: Yeah.

FROST: People you knew might give their cousins in and stuff like that. But that didn't get them any special treatment—everybody had a letter from someone! But no, we didn't really -- not a -- not a lot really. Of course it was really -- being a border town it wasn't a, it wasn't a typical Mexican city.

Q: I got to wonder, I would think that it wouldn't be the greatest place to live. I mean, you know, the bordellos, beer, all -- I mean awful lot of young guys would go down there --

FROST: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- to raise hell for --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- a day or two and then head back.

FROST: Yeah, well it was -- I mean it was, it was changing at the time. I mean they still had that, and they still have it today, but it was -- it became much more of a growing concern in terms of they had, they had these twin-plants -- so-called "maquiladora" places along the border, you know, employing Mexicans and so forth. And it was modernizing, it was developing, it was I think richer, a little less seedy than it had been. But there was that whole, yeah, it was -- but I mean we lived in a nice, you know, suburb, suburb type place, you know, with a nice house and so forth. So it wasn't all that different. And of course we did our grocery -- just because -- supermarkets there were fine, but, but American ones were better. So we did our grocery shopping in Ralph's Grocery in San Diego. So we didn't lack for anything. We'd go to movies in the States, we went to church, like I say, in Downtown San Diego. So it was a, it was a, it was a good life. You mentioned though the kind of seediness of it. Everybody had to be Duty Officer every few months, you know. And I wasn't involved in the American Services work except when I was Duty Officer. And basically, during the weekend you were expected to handle pretty much anything that came up short of a major emergency, you know, and kick everything left over to citizen services Monday morning. Which meant visiting the new prisoners Saturday and Sunday that had been picked up during the weekend. So -- and being Duty Officer was really kind of a fulltime job practically. You know, it was really, your beeper and your cell phone were going all the time. And I mean the typical call, what mostly we dealt with people that, you know, their son or, or brother or husband or whatever had gone over to have a good time in Mexico, whether it was a fishing trip or a lobster dinner or drinking or whatever, carousing, you name it. They hadn't come back yet and they were worried about them and they were late and what's happened to them, you know, blah, blah, blah. And usually the answer was nothing, you know. So basically a lot of -- most of your phone traffic was telling these people well, I'm sure he's probably -- they'd say, "Well, my -- my husband is, you know, he usually comes home on time except when he's drinking," you know. And you'd sort of think well, yeah, then maybe he's drinking, you know, possibly. There's a lot of beer down here, you know. And so, you know, it was -- it -- and just kind of -- it was handholding basically, you know. I mean a major event didn't happen very often, you know.

But it was -- but you got these calls, the beepers and, you know, so and so forth. And then every morning one of the, one of the national employees of the, of the ACS Section

would call you us -- call the Duty Officer and, and, and tell you that they'd given a list of the people that were in -- it was the Eighth Street Jail, "La Ocho," that was the main place where they would put drunk people and stuff like that. Kind of a medieval place, you know, downtown. And you know, so you -- the word to the wise was, "Don't even think about going and visiting the prisoners until two o'clock in the afternoon," because by then a lot of them will have been released or bought their way out or, you know, whatever. And the ones that are still left may have, may have a more serious problem, you know, in terms of being in there for a little while. But at least they'll be sober enough to talk to you *(laughs)* by then, you know. So we did that, you know. And so you went down and visited the prisoners and, you know, like I say. So that was, that was, that was interesting.

And they -- another thing they had was they had something called a Bi-National Border Medical Committee or something, because of course treatment options were not so good in Tijuana as compared to San Diego, as far as medical things are concerned. So if somebody gets really sick or badly injured or something like that, you know, whether they're Mexican or American the idea is to get them over to the States as quickly as you can. Of course then you have the problem of how, how does a Mexican get over and, you know, does, you know, how does that work in terms of the visa and stuff? But we didn't give visas on weekends, so it never really seemed to happen. But if you had an American that was in distress down there, you know, there was an ambulance service on the other side of the border that would cross and pick them up and take them through, you know? And so I got a call one night with this -- from this bi-national medical person. And she said, "Oh, there's some -- there's some kid down here and he was involved in an auto accident." And said, "Oh, I don't think it's really very serious and he's at Tijuana General Hospital and just -- I just want to let you know that he's, he's there, you know."

So I started thinking about it and I thought, "Well, I don't know, what does not serious mean?" you know, I'm not so sure whether it's really -- how do I know whether this guy's OK or not? So I went down there -- I went down to the Tijuana General Hospital, which was a nice building, but it -- they ran out of money, you know, just constructing the shell. So there wasn't really a whole lot in there, you know, in terms of the equipment and stuff like that. It was very primitive really, you know. Looked good from the outside, but you know, it was -- it was kind of the public hospital of Tijuana, Tijuana General, it's where they take people like that.

So I went and I talked to this kid. And then -- in, in -- and he was being, he was being treated by a Cuban-American kid who was in medical school in, in, in Tijuana. And really nice kid. I don't think he was a border dweller, I don't know. But he spoke Spanish and that's why he was there, I guess. So I said to this kid, "Well, so what do you think about this kid?"

He said, "Well, I don't know. He's bleeding from the ear, and that isn't good." And the kid was kind of woozy, you know, he didn't seem quite like he was with it, you know. He said, "Bleeding from an ear is never good and, b) head injuries are always serious, you know."

So I thought, "Well, crap, I'm not going to" -- and this is, this is -- and then I said -- the thing is I guess he was, he was, he was technically at fault in the accident. And, and, in, in, in Mexico the rule is if you're at fault they, they hold you, you know, until they can judicialize the whole thing, you know, at least, you know. And that's fine. That's not a big deal except if you're injured and bleeding from the ear, whatever.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so I knew this, you know. I wasn't -- like I said didn't do, didn't do ACS work otherwise, but I knew that. And so I said to the doctor, "Well, is -- are -- isn't he supposed to like be detained here or something? He's not supposed to leave or," you know.

He said, he said, "Do you see any cops here? You know, look -- watching him or looking after him or keeping him here?"

I said, "No."

He said, "That's because there aren't any," you know.

I said, "So what do you think?"

He said, "Well, it's a medical decision, you know."

And I say, "Send him over." So you know, I thought, "Well, I'm just -- obviously that's the thing to do." So I just called Hartson's Ambulance Service over in, over in San Diego and they sent an ambulance down immediately and took him to the hospital in the States. And that was that, you know. And, and there were never any repercussions that I ever heard about that.

But apparently he -- his mother called me the next afternoon and said, "Oh, thank you for saving my son's life. I'm a nurse and, and, you know, I went to see him as soon as I found out he was there. And he might a died over there, you know. He does have a head injury, you know. And concussion or something, you know. So I'm sure glad that you did that," *(laughs).* So that was kind of, you know, personally rewarding to save the kid's life. But that was the kind of stuff that -- that was the kind -- it was a Wild West kind of, Fort Apache, the Bronx kind of place, you know.

Q: Well, did you have a problem with criminality? I'm thinking about confidence men, kidnappers. Because right now the place is really dangerous, but in your time --

FROST: No, less, less, less so, you know, less so. There were, there were -- it's -- it's nowhere near -- there were a couple things like I was in my house one night, it was up on the hill and it -- up on this hill, like I say, nice view, overlooking, you could see parts of San Diego and stuff. And one morning, early in the morning hours I was awaken by this

loud pounding on my front door. Had no security, not any kind of -- not even hardly a deadbolt, you know, it was -- no security whatsoever. And there was this voice out there and he saying, "Gregorio! Gregorio!"

And my name being Gregory, I thought, "Well, how -- how does he know my name?" You know, what -- and it was this kind of eerie, "Gregorio" and this pounding. And I thought, "Gee, I don't know, I don't think -- hope he can't break the door down." So I didn't -- I didn't know what to do. So I called a -- a -- one of the officers that worked for me in the NIV (Non-Immigrant Visa) Section who lived just down the, down the street. And so I, I, I called and I said, "Joe, I'm," you know, "I'm kind of desperate here." We didn't have any, any -- security was just non-existent. We had a couple local cops that we paid a stipend to to guard the consulate, you know. And they weren't equipped to do that. And I just really didn't know what to do. And so I, I said, "Joe, can you just drive up -- get in the car -- please get out and drive the, drive up the hill in your car and see what's going on outside my house. I don't know. I don't want to open that door and I can't see -- I can't -- this little tiny peephole that I can't see anything." So he drove up and -- it was a drunk -- just, just kind of drunk, almost homeless person type I guess, out there, you know, and at the time -- I don't know whether he finally, you know, left in unconsciousness or whatever. But anyway, he went away, he left, and that was the end of that. But it was really scary, made, made me realize how, you know, vulnerable we were. And then another time a friend of another guy that worked for me had an apartment down by -- really near the consulate in this really nice new modern building, it was an apartment building. And he -- some guy collapsed into his -- was pounding his door at some odd hour or something. Maybe it was during the day and his wife was home or something. She opened the door and some guy collapsed bleeding into his living room. And it turned out he was running from somebody and had been shot. And it was somehow connected to that boxer that later became famous, Julio Cesar Chavez. There was some connection there between this guy and his entourage or something. But again, that was kind of, you know, and -- but that was the exception. So I mean it's just --

Q: What about, were the police honest?

FROST: No, they were not honest. We had the municipal police at our consulate and we had to fire -- we -- you know, it was great because we -- they, they paid them, but we paid them the stipend in an effort to try to keep them honest, anyway. But you know, they -- but you know, I think it was kind of the Barney Fife thing, one bullet in the front pocket or something, you know, and that sort of thing.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And they were -- they were kind of -- they were in charge of crowd control, and they didn't work for us. So you know, God only knows how people got their -- got in line, you know. People would camp out there overnight and we would tell people it's stupid to do that because if you, if you get here by ten you can get right in for an interview, so why -- but you know. And so every day we'd notice that the first, the first like 20 or 25 applicants that we had in line with their -- we'd go out and ticket them, you

know. We'd go out at nine o'clock or eight, or whatever, and hand -- put these theater tickets, staple them to their passports and, you know, that was the order. And it was great because it was a two-part ticket, you know, two, two halves, you know. So basically when they came in for their interview, if they got the vis -- if they, if they were issued you'd, you'd rip off part of the ticket and hand it to them and say, "Present this out there at four o'clock, pick up your passport." The other half with the identical number would be on the passport. Primitive but efficient kind of system, you know. We had -- we changed colors every day. We had all these different rolls of tickets of different colors, so that would kind of -- you know, and -- but I mean the order in which those people were standing in line when we went out to hand out the tickets with our stapler in hand, you know. And a lot of times you'd look at them -- if -- we'd look -- a lot of them -- Guadalajara was the main consulate for the interior, further afield, you know. So generally speaking a lot of times a lot of these people were -- they were going to -- they were making their way north, they tried to get a visa in Guadalajara, they were refused because they were obviously immigrants. And then they would make their way to Tijuana and try one more time before they hired a coyote. So we'd look at their passport and we used to mark the refusals back in the old days, you know, on the back of the passport. You'd said, "GDL," you know, and yesterday's date on it, that means he'd been refused in Guadalajara yesterday. So basically, you -- a lot of times we just sent them away right then, said we're not going to interview you. Or if we did interview we just sort of said it's going to be very difficult. There was a little bit of pre-screening that we did about -- said, "It's going to be difficult if not impossible. You're wasting your time, you know. But we'll give you a hearing, you know, whatever." And then we knew what kind of, what kind of, you know, problems we were facing in the line already by having gone out in the street to do this. I mean it was kind of unsafe when you think about it, walking around on the street, you know, like that in front of the consulate, you know, with no setback.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But that's, that's what we did. And so that, that was, you know, in, and the other thing was that corruption in terms of -- I remember I was talking about being a Duty Officer and once I was -- I got a -- I was -- people would -- if you were arrested for drugs, for possession of drugs, basically that -- the rule was -- the way it worked in Mexico, that was a federal offense was drugs, you know, not a, not a state or local offense. So but the Feds aren't going to get involved right away. And so you're kind of in the Eighth Street Jail for several days and it's not comfortable. And then, you know, then -- but at some point they, they figure that, you know, it -- oh, this, this is just a young kid from California, it's a small -- he was caught with one joint or marijuana residue, small enough for personal use, he's not a trafficker, he's not a criminal, you know, he has no record that we know of. So they just -- they basically -- in due course they would take you and dump you back across the border. But you'd probably be in jail for a week or ten days awaiting that, and that's not fun. So there's always going to be -- that's when the corruption sets in about, you know, how they, they, you know, if you, if you, if you paid off, you know, they'll let you out, you know. And so that, that was -- and we would always take the position when we'd talk to the family members, well look, you know, that's up to you. We don't, we don't condone, you know, buying people out. We're,

we're against corruption, but I mean this is an option you'll probably have, so it's up to you whether you want to exercise it or not. We're not involved in it, we're not going to be the -- we're not going to pass money to anyone, we're not, you know. That's between you and whoever you're dealing with, you know. And so, so one day this -- I was dealing with this smug -- this kid, and it was one of those cases, you know. So she sent a -- she negotiated a price for like a thousand bucks, I guess, or something, and sent it -- sent a friend of the son down to deliver the money. And then she called and said, "Oh, the friend is here. And guess what? All of a sudden, they've upped the price and they want 1500." And it just made me madder than hell, you know. Because it's one thing to take a thousand dollars from this poor woman, and it's another thing to, to jerk her around like that.

So I said, "OK, let me, let me, let me check on that and I'll call you back."

So I called down there where the kid was. I had -- I don't think I'd even visited him at that point. I can't remember. But I didn't, you know, I didn't -- and, and I called down. It was the judicial police or something. A guy called -- he answers the phone, and I said, "Well, I understand that so and so is down there and that, you know, he, he, you know, he, he was going to be released upon payment of a thousand dollars and now you're telling 'em 1500, you know, what's that about?" And he hemmed and hawed, and I said, "Well, look, let me tell ya. If you don't release this kid inside 15 minutes for the original price, none of your officers -- I'm in charge of visas at the consulate, that's what I normally do, that's my day job. And if, if, if you don't release the, this kid in ten minute -- 15 minutes, he -- none of your officers is ever going to get a visa from us again."

And he said, "Are you threatening me?"

And I said, "Yes," *(laughs).*

So he hung up and about ten minutes later Mom called me and said, "Well, I don't know what you did, but it worked," *(laughs).*

And I said, "I'm not quite sure whether I should have done it, but you know, I'm glad it worked, so I, you know." Afterwards I, gee, I probably could have gotten in some trouble for that, but you know. That was -- like I say, Fort Apache, the Bronx comes to mind.

Q: Did you have the feeling that police were arresting people who hadn't done anything?

FROST: Well, interesting you should mention that, because there was one -- subsequently the -- there was a place called Rosarito Beach, which was just down on the coast. It was beautiful highway on the way to Ensenada. It's like almost like Big Sur, you know, and stuff like that. It wasn't quite that far, just, just south of Tijuana. A nice little place with good seafood restaurants and lobster and stuff, you know. And the beach wasn't much, but you know, it's too cold to swim there anyway. But anyway, it -- a common, you know, weekend tourist destination. And, and they discovered a lot of kids were getting arrested down there like for marijuana residue, you know. And it was

starting to look like a racket. And one, one relative managed to tape a negotiation between her and the Head of the Police down there. And it was kind of like -- it was almost right out of, right out of, you know, central casting, and it, it was almost like stereotypical, you know. "We can settle this under the table." And they had him on tape.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And you know, they sent the, they sent the, the, the, the tape to the Head Commander in the area. Nothing happened. Nobody was fired, nothing happened, you know. And I mean they caught red-handed and, you know, but there was no response. So yeah, I mean there wasn't -- a lot of -- a lot of the things that happened I'm sure didn't come to us, you know. I mean we -- they were settled without our intervention one way or another.

Q: Besides the police, was there a criminal element there? I mean were there, you know, bars where you went and all of a sudden you got a bill for champagne, which you hadn't ordered?

FROST: I didn't work in the American Citizen Services Section for the routine cases, if you know what I mean. So I only basically dealt with the rest and accidents and stuff on weekends. So I can't really say, but you know, I would guess again it's probably not as bad as it is in --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- in any respect.

Q: Well, I mean were you concerned as --

FROST: Of course there was a -- I mean the tourism was such a big draw that I mean there -- the police maybe, you know, they probably did a better job than we gave them credit for in terms of like, you know, probably more reputable places were pretty well policed. But you know, if you, if you went to some place where that happened it was probably because you were stupid and, you know, you should have known better *(laughs).* But I mean given the, given the volume I'd say probably that, you know, very few people had big problems, you know.

Q: Yeah. After this, about two years, was that enough?

FROST: Well yeah, I mean it was -- I'd gotten, I'd gotten -- despite, you know, my less than smooth exit from, I got promoted while I was in language training. So my, my job there was graded FS-3 and I was an FS-2, reporting to another FS-2. I would have liked to have gotten moved up to the head of the ACS Section, but somebody that had been promised to someone already. So I was just kind of chafing, although I was kind of enjoying what I did, you know. But it was sort of like, you know, this is not really a career-enhancing job here. And so, you know, I decided I wanted to go back to Africa, I

was almost selected as DCM in Djibouti, which would have gotten me out a little early, but that fell through for some reason.

Q: How did your wife find Tijuana?

FROST: She, she eventually got a job as an Admin Assistant in the consulate, which was, which was good, kind of half time I think it was more or less, part-time anyway. And she enjoyed it. Of course she was busy with two little girls at home. So when -- we had a -- we hired a girl from the consulate cleaning -- they had some contractor that provided cleaning service with the consulate, and I hired an 18-year-old girl to be sort of a nanny, got her out of that terrible job that she was in, you know. So that worked out well and we had good childcare from her. And when she was sick or whatever she'd send her sister over. And we became friends with her family and that was nice. I decided I wanted to be DCM in Africa for my next tour. I had four plus French and there were a number of FS-2 level DCM-ships advertised in Francophone Africa. So I paid my own way back to D.C. for a week and lobbied for DCM-ships in Africa, you know, Central African Republic, Guinea -- which other ones were there -- Togo maybe, I don't know. Whichever ones were opening, I went to see the Office Director and whatever contacts I still had in AF and so forth. And I didn't care really which one I got, as long as I got one of them. I really wanted to be at a "real" Foreign Service post again, which as much as did like Tijuana it was not. And so I ended up in the next DCM in Conakry, which was my next assignment.

Q: All right. Conakry is the capital of --

FROST: Guinea, formally known as French Guinea.

Q: What was the situation in Guinea? You were there from when to when?

FROST: I was there from August of '88 to July of '91, so it was a three-year tour.

Q: What was the situation in Guinea?

FROST: Well, it was one of the notorious black holes of the Foreign Service, I think. You know, one of the most difficult hardship posts, famous in folklore in a way. And it had emerged only in 1984 from probably one of the worst dictatorships in the history of Africa, if not history of the world under Sékou Touré, who became president at independence 1958 and ruled as a dictator until his death in 1984. They were the first francophone country in the whole wave of independence that crested in the 1960s. Ghana was the first one Anglophone in '57, followed by Guinea in '58. When Touré died of natural causes in 1984, he was president for life and had made no provisions for a succession. Lansana Conté, the senior colonel in the army, staged a coup and took over. And so at the time I arrived Conté had ruled as head of a transitional military council about four years. And there was a lot of interest in Guinea beyond what it probably otherwise merited, because everybody had heard of Sékou Touré and the idea was can we help this country get out of this terrible national nightmare that it suffered under this

despotic ruler and, you know, bring them forward? Toure had kicked out the French at independence. Guinea was the only newly-independent country in francophone Africa that didn't develop kind of a cozy neo-colonial relationship with France. They were the other side of the coin from that represented by Houphouët-Boigny in the Ivory Coast who was kind of in the pocket of the French.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And Sékou Touré said, "Well, we want to *really* become independent" in '58."

So the French said, "Well, that's fine. We'll just leave and take everything with us."

And they did that. There are still scuttled ships in the harbor when I was there and they're still there today, that were sunk by the French to prevent them from -- you know, they couldn't bring them home so they didn't want the bad guys to have them, so I sank them in the harbor. So allegedly there are all sorts of, of urban legend-type stories about they took the silverware out of the restaurants and ripped the phones out of the wall.

Q: Yeah… That's --

FROST: And it was downhill from there, you know. My Economic Officer described it -- he had a good phrase I think. As he put it, "Guinea is a country still struggling to reach its *natural* level of under development," *(laughs).*

Q: Were you seeing sort of a reemergence of ties to France or --

FROST: Yes, the French were just coming back. And they were, they were, they were involved a lot of things. They were they were back. They kept the place going more or less. They provided -- they had an insurance industry there, you know, they had -- they, they were doing infrastructure, making it a -- you know, not a *very* livable place, maybe, but a *more* livable place than it otherwise would have been. You know, lots of practical stuff, you know, in the old neo-colonial spirit. And there were -- AID was doing this airy-fairy stuff of you know, what AID does. And so the French were, you know -- I like the French of course, because -- and I spent a lot of time with French people while I was there. Most Americans don't and, you know, there were sort of pro-French and anti-French factions within the embassy in that sense. But the French were the -- the French were really doing what the country needed to get back on its feet. And we were doing this kind of typical traditional development work, the writing studies that sit on shelves and were never read and stuff like that. But AID was also expanding at the time. So yeah, the -- that was, that was main thing. The French were back.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

FROST: A fellow named Sam Lupo who was an admin type, spent most of his career in Latin America. He was Consular General in Rio and had been Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel before coming out there. He was kind of an old hand, but had no African

experience previous to that and just learned French at FSI before he went out. And I think he was -- I think he was going to Belize but then that fell through and he ended up in Guinea for some reason because he still wanted to be Ambassador. So he had been there for a year when I arrived. And my predecessor was of in terms of Africanists a kind of legendary guy named Bill Mithoefer. Bill had been either DCM or Political Counselor in just about every African country there was.

Q: I've interviewed Bill.

FROST: Uh-huh, he's a very interesting character. And kind of larger than life figure.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Somebody told me once, "I think Bill has probably entertained more Africans than any living American diplomat." And indeed, his living room furniture was filthy to show for it when I got there *(laughs).* But he had -- he was -- he was a tremendous -- he was a really good contact man, good, great pure Political Officer. His reports could have been better—he seemed to want to summarize his previous reporting on the subject before he got into the new stuff. But in terms of the information he developed he was just tremendous. And the Ambassador told me when I got there he that "If you he had a cocktail party with 50 people and let one secret or scoop loose in that room, Bill Mithoefer would always ferret it out."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know. And bring it back and report on it, you know. And that's the kind of guy he was, you know. He usually went -- he usually would call on people on the way to work just to touch base with the contacts and stuff like that. He was, he was remarkable for that. But he wasn't into management. I think I saw my role in Conakry as to kind of help the Ambassador clean this place up a little bit in a way, you know, without, without, without doing -- denigrating the good stuff and continue the reporting, which was pretty good, you know. And I think I did that. In Tijuana, you know, I still had this kind of -- just going back there for a minute, I, I was -- I was still this political wannabe I guess a little bit, and I organized a reporting program for the Junior Officers in Tijuana in my last months, and developed a reporting plan. The DCM came up from Mexico City and, and, and said, you know, "You guys should do some reporting up here."

And the JO's were like, "With what time? With what energy?" you know, they were kind of resentful of it.

But I said, "Let's take this, the challenge. Let's see if we can do that, you know, and satisfy this guy and we'll all look good." So we all -- I did some reports and, and the -- the officers did them and we got kudos on several cables we did and stuff like that. So I, you know, I kind of was excited about doing that on a larger scale in Guinea. So, so we had two good second tour officers in Conakry --Political Officer and one Econ Officer. And we did -- they did most of the reporting and I just kind of supervised and guided it.

Q: Well, what was the government at that time like?

FROST: Well, I mean they weren't really very competent. Most of the ministers were civilian. Or maybe by that time it was maybe half and half. Some of them were military. They weren't very good, there was no depth. They were, you know, everybody was falling all over themselves give them aid, and the ministers spent half their time dealing with delegations that were coming in, you know, and meeting visitors and stuff like that. You know, I'm not saying they wouldn't -- would have been good at doing any real work had they had time, but they didn't have time, you know? So it was just kind of your, your, your typical, you know inept African government with low levels of education generally.

Q: They had a military, but was it much of a military or was it just --

FROST: No, it wasn't much of a military. We had a minor military assistance program, which was, you know, run by our civilian Political Officer, which was basically giving them radios and trying to, trying to -- we gave them a few coastal patrol boats, you know. Because there was a lot of pirate-type fishing that went on done by South Koreans and whatnot and Taiwanese in there territorial waters that they couldn't police their economic zone. People were just vacuuming up the fish off the ocean floor practically *(laughs),* you know. And we were trying to -- trying to help them deal with that. It wasn't -- it was pretty, it wasn't very successful.

Q: Guinea is bounded by what countries?

FROST: Well, let's see, it got -- let's see. Starting from north and -- it's kind of like shaped like a kidney. It's kind of like -- let's see.

Q: We've got a map.

FROST: Oh. Back over --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Yeah, well, you can see it's kind of --

Q: Guinea's in yellow.

FROST: -- you can see Guinea in yellow there, yeah. So clockwise you have Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. So you got a number of countries bordering us --

Q: Did any of them at that particular time have problems that spilled over or?

FROST: Only -- later -- it -- during -- towards the end of my tour there was the outbreak of the Liberian Civil War.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Which later spread to Sierra Leone.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And generated huge numbers of refugees.

Q: Was Taylor going then or?

FROST: Taylor was starting then. It was -- I remember this, because I was -- it was Christmas Eve 1989 when Taylor started his insurgency, it was probably one of the most successful guerilla insurgencies in history. He started with a small band of guys up in the, the corner of the country -- there were some tribes that really hated -- that really hated-- Samuel Doe, the first and only I guess non-Americo-Liberian president who we had propped for ten years, but he was essentially a failure, you know. And, Doe did was to massacred a number civilians belonging to a couple of rival tribes to his up in the corner of the country by way of reprisal. This generated recruits to Taylors's insurgency, Doe's army was largely made up of members of Doe's own tribe, the Krahn. Taylor was an Americo-Liberian himself. But there were a couple of tribes, the Gio and Mano, who were his main supporters. And his massacres stirred things up and drew more recruits to his cause. And so there was kind of a snowball effect. Taylor's force gathered strength and power and recruits as he sort of swept through the countryside until he got to Monrovia, at which point he couldn't take the palace, the seat of power or the symbol of it anyway. You have to take the palace if you're going take and hold in power in Africa. If you don't, you're not a completely successful insurgency. So that was where he stalled.. And then his movement split. There was a rebel commander even more thuggish than Taylor named Prince Johnson. Taylor's movement was called the NPFL, National Patriotic Front of Liberia, I believe. Prince's was the INPFL. And he would ask people, "Well, you know what INPFL stands for?"

And they said no.

And he said, "It stands for I Need Prince For Liberia."

Q: Ah.

FROST: And this guy was -- this guy was -- he was a evil guy, but he was -- there was a clownish nature to him. And apparently there was -- we sent an envoy out at one point from Washington to talk to these guys, you know. And he went over and saw the prince's place. And he had a big Budweiser sign that said "Budweiser," followed by, "Headquarters Prince Johnson, Provincial President of Liberia," or something, you know. And they ushered the envoy in and served him warm beer and African food. And then a curtain opened apparently and Prince got on his guitar and played gospel music for them. And it was like this surreal sort of thing. Only Africa could have something like this. One

of the stories said that knocked on his ex-girlfriend's door one day and she answered it, and he shot her right between the eyes then and there because she betrayed him or something. So he was like, you know. This was the alternative to Charles Taylor.

Q: Oh.

FROST: Charles Taylor you think of as a bad guy, but Prince was worse.

Q: Well, did you have any dealings with these people?

FROST: No, I was just kind of watching it from afar. Sometimes we could hear Charles Taylor on the radio because it would carry across the airwaves, you know, and so we could listen to some of his conversations. But we did not have any -- we just dealt -- what we were dealing with was the, was the backlash of the refugees coming across. And as I say, it later spread to, Sierra Leone as well.

Q: Well, was there any messing around in that area by Gaddafi?

FROST: Well, he had supposed -- there was some -- he had definitely was thought to have, to have somehow financed or supported Charles Taylor, you know, to launch the insurgency. It was kind of a weird combination, you know, Blaise Compaoré, who was in -- who was in -- let's see, I'm trying to get -- don't want to get confused here. Blaise Compaoré was in -- was he in Burkina? Anyway, the Burkinabés were supporting -- they were -- and they were buddies with Libya and they were supporting Taylor, so Libya supported them and they supported Taylor. And somehow -- Houphouët-Boigny in Ivory Coast was kind of supporting him too and basically allowed Ivory Coast to be used as a launching pad for Charles Taylor and his 26 (really, I think that was all there were) original cadres. You know, and the reason is that, that Africans have very long memories. Houphouët-Boigny's daughter had been married to one of -- was it Tubman that was the last -- the President that was overthrown by Doe -- Tubman or Tolbert. Tolbert I think maybe.

Q: I think it was Tolbert.

FROST: Tolbert.

Q: Tolbert, yeah.

FROST: Anyway, he -- his daughter was married to one of Tolbert's cabinet ministers, Houphouët's daughter. And so when, when, when Doe took power you may remember they took a -- they, they took out the cabinet members, they dragged them out on the beach, they tied them to barrels that were green and white and shot them, you know, just execution style, you know. And he was, he was one of the ones killed. So that was a Houphouët grudge. And I think Houphouët just thought, "Oh, if I can make some trouble for -- if I can help somebody make some trouble for Samuel Doe then, you know, I hate him so let's just go ahead and we'll let these guys launch out of Ivory Coast. And so he --

and it worked. I mean I don't think anybody dreamed that it would, it would work to the extent that it did, you know. And of course it destroyed the overall security climate of the whole region, you know, and made Guinea look like a island of stability, you know, as it spread.

Q: Was there blood diamonds or oil or any of that stuff that was in the stew?

FROST: Yeah. I mean that was -- that's -- there was, you know, the timber in Liberia and the blood diamonds in Sierra Leone, and you know, that was all sort of going on. Like I say, we were -- it wasn't really -- we weren't involved in that a whole lot in Guinea, but we knew -- we knew it was going on and the reporting was talking about it and stuff like that. And there was also -- I thought -- yeah, yeah, there was -- there was -- there was, you know, all of that stuff, yeah.

Q: Did we have Peace Corps there?

FROST: We did. And that was not really affected.

Q: Did you find you spent much time with the Peace Corps?

FROST: Quite a lot, yeah. We had them -- we had them over to our house for -- we had a pool and so we had them over to our house when, when they were sworn in and stuff like that, and we'd go out and see -- try to see them on our trips out in the countryside and so on and so forth.

Q: How did they seem to fit in?

FROST: They did well. They, they were, they had, you know, were liked in their villages I think and had -- it was a good program.

Q: Was there another ambassador besides Sam Lupo when you were --

FROST: Sam left after my first two years-- he had been there a year when I got there and so he did two years and then he left. And he was replaced by Dane Smith who'd been I think previous to that DCM in Khartoum I believe for his previous assignment. I had met him when he was in Botswana when I was in Lesotho and he came down for a weekend to take his daughter to ride horses or something. So I had met, had met him and his wife there. So he took -- but I was in charge during the interim, and that was really interesting because when that was when Guinea went to war, because basically remember there was a -- there was a ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), the local community of West African nations, had like an intervention for us in Liberia called -- it was called ECOMOG, the ECOWAS monitoring group, although it was known colloquially as ECOMOB because they were --

Q: (chuckles)

FROST: -- more like a mob than they were an army. I remember going over to talk to the Defense Minister and all this stuff and they were all excited and they were painting all their tanks -- such as they had armored vehicles and stuff -- painting them white and painting their helmets white, you know, because white was the color of peace and they were peacekeepers and all this stuff. And you know, they were actually going into action and so forth. And the Deputy Commander was a Guinean. He was one of the old guard from the "temporary" original military junta, one of the, one of the only ones that was left by that time, you know. And so they sent him off to be commander of, of this force, you know, or Deputy Commander maybe. And so they were excited, you know, about going to war, you know. And it was kind of a fiasco, or ineffective of course, to say the least. But I developed a good relationship with the Senior Advisor to the President and would go down and visit him. They had this huge and basically empty building called the *Palais des Nations.* which was built for some Organization of African Unity (OAU) conference that was never held—it was an enormous white elephant. I went there to meet this guy but I didn't go to an identifiable office. It's really weird, I went to this huge building and he'd meet me at the door and had the key to some random room and would come up and unlock the door and I would, I would have a meeting with him, you know, ask him what they were planning and stuff. So it was kind of fun to do that, you know, because I was in charge for that little while-- at sort of the height of all this stuff.

Q: You said they were rather ineffective. I mean --

FROST: Yeah. I mean they, they didn't, you know, they just kind of were -- I think they were pretty much ignored by Taylor, you know, and peace did not come.

Q: Were the Soviets messing around in those days?

FROST: Well, the Soviets were, were -- they were, you know, it was kind of a semi-client state of Soviet Union. Had been for -- and of course during, during the Angolan Civil War they were refueling planes to fly Cuban troops into Angola and stuff like that there, you know. And, and -- but of course remember, this was, this was -- glasnost had hit by then, you know. And, and the Soviet Union was on its way out.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: In fact, the whole, the whole Soviet Empire was crumbling, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And that was, that was -- they were just -- they were not -- they didn't play, you know, because --

Q: How about China?

FROST: China? They had an embassy there too, but I don't think they were very active, you know, at that point. They were pretty, pretty, pretty small at that time. But it was

interesting to be in the middle of this crumbling. Like I, I went out with a -- I, I had -- there was an East German and a West German embassy there, you know, and, and, and they realized they could see German reunification coming, I think, you know, and so the two ambassadors had dinner together one night, which had never happened, you know, and the German community was all shaken up by this, what's going to happen. And my poor East German counterpart was worried about his job, you know, because his country was going away He told me, "I have to go back to Berlin and I don't even know whether I'm going to have an apartment anymore, let alone a job," and you know. And the Romanian Ambassador whose name -- and I'm not making this up -- was Petru Despot was, was the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, which is kind of --

Q: Ohh.

FROST: -- He had been there forever you know. And, and it was just all these things were happening, you know. I went to the Romanian National Day and that was weird, you know, because their regime was about ready to collapse, as it subsequently did a few months later. And then I had -- but I had dinner with, with my, my Soviet counterpart one time, just called him up and invited him, took him out to dinner. I wrote a little cable on it called "Glasnost in Guinea." I call it "My Dinner with Andre," because there was a film -- and his name was Andre and there was a film called that current at the time and I decided "My Dinner with Andre, Glasnost in Guinea," you know. Just – he's like asking all these questions, "What's it like in South Africa? And gee, you know, it would be interesting to be there, you know."

And, and, and it was just kind of, you know, almost surreal, you know. And then, and then they had the, the -- what turned out to be the very last Soviet Army Day because a year from then the Soviet Army didn't exist. And so he didn't exist. They had -- you know, it used to be -- the rule was because ever since they invaded Afghanistan, for Soviet Army Day, you could only send one officer from the embassy and it had to be military, attaché, rank of major or below, and stuff like that, because we didn't want to hobnob with the Red Army and all this stuff. Well, they just, they just relaxed all that and they said, you know, "Anybody wants to go can go." And all of us got invitations, you know, the Political Officer, the Econ Officer, me, I don't think the Ambassador, but he probably wouldn't have gone. And so we all, we all went to this, the Soviet Army Day just to see what it was like.

And you know, talked to our counterparts and it was really strange. The Political Officer had kind of a surreal conversation with his counterpart. He said, "Well, I'm not allowed to talk to you because you outrank me, because you're Secretary and I'm just an attaché or something like that."

So my, my, my colleague says, "Well OK, well why don't we work a deal?" Said, "If I'm -- if I'm senior to you why don't I order you to talk to me?"

And he said, "OK, that'll work."

Q: (laughs)

FROST: And so they talked away. I went up to my counterpart, who I'd met at -- I'd been at a couple diner parties with already. He was a new one. Andre had left and so this new guy came in. I'd met this new guy and the poor guy, he, he was, he was -- he spoke Eng -- you know, usually in Africa they have guys -- and China's the same way -- they have people who speak either English or French. And they sent them to whichever country whose language they speak. Or sometimes they'll have -- the Chinese even had a tandem couple, I think, where they had the French speaker was a husband and the, the English speaker was the wife and, and they would -- one of them would either do the translating for the other and it was like a tandem team. But anyway, this guy -- this new guy, he was -- he spoke English, he was destined to some English speaking country and then all of a sudden he got shifted -- that fell through and he got shifted to Guinea where he didn't speak any French at all, you know, and nobody speaks Russian. So he was miserable and didn't want to be there, you know, really kind of dour guy, you know. So I went up to him that evening and I was trying to make polite conversation and I thought -- I said, "Well hey, you know, I've never had any, any Russian beer, you know, you must have -- probably get some from Moscow once in a while. Could you send me a, you know, six-pack or case if you got that much? I'd like to try it, you know. I've never had it."

He says, he says -- he sort of looked at me and says -- frowns and says, "You wouldn't like it. It's no good," *(laughs).* You know, they don't even have a beer there to be proud of, how *sad*.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And they were all running around being kind of giddy and I guess they'd never had an event like that where people actually came, Americans were there, you know, and six of us or however many, you know. And it's just -- it was just fascinating, you know. I went to the first -- the first national day after German reunification and, you know, my, my German counterpart -- West German counterpart, you know, was apparently favorite of the Foreign Minister Franz-Josef Strauss, which is how he got the job, and the Ambassador was an old school German diplomat. And the Ambassador was, was gung-ho for unification and the younger one -- my counterpart wasn't so sure about it *(laughs),* you know. And in -- anyway, it was just, it was an interesting time to be in an old Soviet client state.

Q: Did the State Department, our state Department intrude much? Or were you sort of left out there and --

FROST: Well, I mean of course the Office of West Africa Affairs has a whole bunch of countries to cover.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: But they were interested in us. And like I say, everybody's interested in Guinea more than they otherwise would have been just because it's a legendary place. So but yeah, we were -- we, we, you know, they liked our reporting and, you know, we worked hard on that. And so it was -- we were not a preoccupation for anyone. That's, that's, that's for sure. And we kind of had this -- kind of had this weird adversarial relationship with the embassy in Abidjan, because if you read their cables and you'd think -- if you didn't know better you'd think their host country was practically French, you know. And the French, the Frenchification is a very thin veneer there, which wore away, you know. It's pretty much gone now I think, you know. And so they were just -- I think they were just scornful of, of, you know, *our* host country as too bush a place and that meant they were kind of scornful of us, you know what I mean? And so we just kind of had this weird sort of, you know, we kind of trashed their cables and they probably trashed ours *(laughs).*

Q: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Well, I mean this happens. I mean it's partly identified with the country up to a point. I was in Yugoslavia and Belgrade and we had an adversarial relationship to our Consul General --

FROST: Yeah, the Serbia and Croatia rivalry.

Q: Oh, absolutely.

FROST: Yeah. Well, I've often had a theory that embassies kind of inevitably and to some extent reflect the environment in which they are in, you know. And that's probably why we were so combative. I mentioned the combative spirit of the South Africa Desk when I was there, probably because, you know, that's where our major clients were combative, so we kind of took on their persona a little bit, you know.

Q: Well, did events in South Africa resound in Guinea at all?

FROST: Well, let's see. I remember being -- I went to a trade fair in Abidjan I think once and I -- that was around the time Nelson Mandela was being released, I think, you know. And it was kind of a far off -- I mean it seemed like another universe, you know. I followed it as closely as I could out there given --

Q: Well, you were a hell of a long way's away.

FROST: Yeah. So --

Q: But you're in Africa, so.

FROST: Yeah, yeah. But it was just kind of -- I mean who would have thought, you know, that, that it all would have happened and so quickly. But it didn't really have much effect locally. There were too many local problems for everybody to worry about. I'm going to stop for just one second.

Q: Greg, did you have a feeling in Guinea that there was a potential for anything, either the people or the natural resources or something that could make it more than a marginal state?

FROST: Well, there were, there were certainly the resources. You know, it was one of the world's largest bauxite producers. There was also a functioning western-run gold mine and a diamond mine as well, both of which we visited, were fascinating. These sort of enclave mining kind of places.

Q: How does the mining work? Because you know, you think of people mining there and looking and gee, that looks promising and sticking it in their pocket or something.

FROST: Well, it's -- you know, it's, it's very unglamorous. Bauxite is basically -- they had -- there's just a mountain of bauxite up in -- up near the coast in north not too far from Guinea, the south border. And the main bauxite mine was a conglomerate of Alcan and Alcoa and these big western aluminum countries and big companies. Basically they were just -- they were just moving huge masses of earth, you know, dismantling this mountain. And they had their own railroad and they ship it down to, to ships that would come in and, and load it up with bauxite and take it off to wherever it was smelted and refined, you know. They had their own huge generating plant because, you know, their big earthmovers -- were run on electric power that were generated by them. And the gold mining, the gold and diamond mining were the same way. There was a layer of gold bearing rock. It was alluvial gold, so it was sediment I guess, you know, with gold flakes and dust and stuff in it. And then the diamonds was, you know, diamond bearing layer. So you had to move huge amounts of earth to get to where the, the diamond bearing and gold bearing strata was and remove that. And then, and then you had a plant where you could process it and extract the diamonds and stuff like that. So it was -- but it kind of was, you know, and, and since the government really couldn't do much, you know, basically these mines would -- they would fix roads. If a bridge broke down mining people would go out and send their welders out to fix it and, you know, kind of do a lot of social projects.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, and stuff like that. And of course the government, you know, got their cut of royalties from these places, you know. And -- but they expected the mine to do all this kind of public works kind of stuff too because they had no capacity to do it. So I mean -- yeah, I mean it's just that they -- imagine, 26 years Sékou Touré was in power, you know, and nobody was educated and, and you know, it was, it was horrible, you know. I mean the, the, the -- I had a -- I had a good contact of mine who wrote a book called *La Verite du Ministre* ("The Minister's Truth"), He was a Minister of Sport I think at one time under Sékou Touré. And he was a very educated man, a lawyer, great guy. You know, the -- he talked -- there was a story which he confirmed to me as true. There was some little kid that said -- he was at school one day and the teacher said, "What do you want to -- what do you want to be when you grow up?"

And he said, “I want -- I’d kind of like to be President of the Republic.”

This got back to Sekou Toure who had the kid arrested and thrown in a concentration camp for being a threat to government. I mean it -- he said -- my friend said, “Honest to God, this really happened,” you know. And I visited this place my last place in the country and I got -- it wasn’t -- everybody knew where it was and nobody talked about it, you know, and it was just kind of fallen into disrepair. Camp Boiro it was called, and it was -- it was basically a small concentration camp in the middle of Conakry. Now, I got somebody to take me there just before I left because I really wanted to see it. You know, and people wrote in their own excrement on the walls, you know, messages and stuff, you know, in their cells. My friend had been in solitary confinement there for ten years before he finally got released, you know. I mean so with that kind of -- that kind of atmosphere, you know, I mean it was just -- they kind of -- I mean -- West Africans are natural born traders, you know. They don’t have to teach them commerce because it’s like in their blood, you know. Look at Nigeria and stuff. You know what I mean. But these people had it beaten out of them, literally. How do you recover from that, you know? It hasn’t gotten any better since. It’s now -- Sékou Touré’s been dead for 28 years, you know, and, and it’s just not getting any better. So I don’t know. It’s sad. It’s just -- I went back -- I, I went back as a WAE (When Actually Employed) retired annuitant and did Consular work for a month just to see what it was like -- when I got an opportunity back in 2006. And it was -- and had dinner with this old contact of mine, you know -- still had his law office that was mainly run by his daughter. He’s probably 75 by now. And I said well -- his nickname was Porthos, like the Musketeer, Porthos Diallo. So I said, “Well Porthos, what, what do you think about this?” And Sékou Touré was still in power back then. And I said well, I said, “What do you think about the situation now?”

And he said, “Well, I’ll tell you.” They actually had newspapers then, which they didn’t have when I was there, you know. “So if I want to write something critical of the government I can do that and nothing will happen to me. It’ll be published, you know, in one of these little newspapers we have now. And if I want to drive to Sierra Leone for the weekend, you know, I can do that too and I won’t be followed and nothing will happen to me, you know. And, and that’s a good thing, you know,” *(laughs).* But there were still no politics to speak of, you know, and still a dictatorship, you know, by Lansana Conté.

You know, and then, then I was either -- I was talking -- I had a staff meeting one time when my collaborator was away so I was in charge of the Consular Section. So I had a staff meeting one time and I asked the Senior FSN, I said, “Well, OK, well what would happen if say you or maybe I or you and I or whoever would go down to this traffic circle down there, you know, a block away and, you know, hold up signs, *“A bas Conté!”* and start demonstrating and yelling against the government. What would happen say if it were you?”

And he said, “Well, I think that after a while the police would come. They would take me a .way and I’d disappear for a few days. And when I came back I wouldn’t do that anymore,” *(laughs).* You know, so, so I mean, you know, it wasn’t -- it, it, it was still in this kind of, you know --

Q: It wasn't really benign.

FROST: Yeah, yeah. So it was just -- it was a very sad place.

Q: Did you have a -- was the educational system moving up?

FROST: It was -- no, it was completely dysfunctional, yeah. There were, there were, there was nothing really in the country that worked. Except for these mining companies really.

Q: Well, you left there when?

FROST: Well, the Econ Officer and I arrived the same day on the 31st of August, by the way, in '88. And Ambassador said, "I knew I was getting two pretty smart guys when the -- when your TEDs (Transfer Eligibility Dates) were "August" and both of you show up on the very *last* day of the month -- August 31 -- on different flights from Paris. *(laughs).* And that officer came to me a couple days after our arrival -- at our seedy old Embassy, which has now been replaced by a new one. You could see kind of the -- and there were literally blocks in that area -- such as where I guess they had demolished the old Sekou Toure palace and replaced it with nothing and stuff like that. And, and my subordinate, my Econ Officer, was a guy named Mark Rondon, whose father was Fred Rondon, who was ambassador a couple times, so he grew up as a Foreign Service kid, unlike me, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And he knew his way around the block obviously. He comes into my office one morning after he'd been there about a week and said, "Gregg, you know, I was just looking down out of my window office, you know, and you know, my God, this place looks like war zone. *And there's never been a war*!"

Q: (laughs)

FROST: *(laughs)* He was the guy who came up with that description, "a country still reaching its natural -- struggling to reach its natural level of underdevelopment. We kind of got into it. Dane Smith, you know, he was a -- he was -- I think we were mainly different personality types, you know. And I'm not saying that I was even remotely ready then, or later, to be Ambassador to Guinea, but he definitely would have been better DCM than me. And I was more temperamentally suited to *his* role, I think. I think. He was a very "check-listy" guy, you know, and was always be super-organized. After we had finished the usual welcoming dinner at my house the first night, he got a little card out of his shirt pocket with all his burning questions on the first day at post, which I thought was kind of weird. But we got along fine, but, he and the USAID director where trying to really bloat up the level of aid we were giving to Guinea, which I guess was their main objective that would be sort of a feather in both their caps. The new Econ

Officer that had come to replace Rondon and I were not too keen on that -- we were against that because their absorptive capacity was already greatly exceeded, you know, and all they were going to do was waste money, if not steal it, you know. And why do we need to have 26 million in aid when we're -- when we already had 13 and nothing was happening to show for it, you know. And of course the USAID Director of course was all for loading it up as much as he could, you know, and we didn't -- so there was kind of this -- there was the, you know, there was the powerless faction, the DCM and Econ Officer, then there's the powerful faction, the AID Director and the Ambassador. So we were going to lose, you know. But we kind of -- we kind of wanted to air it out a bit, debate assistance level issue a little bit..

So finally the Ambassador says, "Gregg, let's look at it this way. Now, if this money really could be used say to help people in East L.A., OK, you know, you might have a point. But if it doesn't go to us it's going to go to Togo, and are they really any better?" You know, "So, so I mean, you know. Stop it!" So we had to fold our hand, you know, and --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and gave up. But anyway, and now I don't know what we're doing there now, probably more. I've lost track. But it was -- I mean we, we, you know, we were all trying, you know, doing our best to turn this sow's ear into a silk purse, you know. Did make you a bit cynical I guess in some ways.

Q: Well, what happened when you left? Where'd you go?

FROST: OK, when I left I decided I wanted to -- I had gotten promoted to FS-1 when I was there. And you're automatically considered for senior training when you make FS-1 apparently, War College and stuff. But I really wanted to do War College, you know, and, and not just sort of, you know -- so I actively, that was really what I wanted to do. Well, I also wanted to be Consul General of Bordeaux, but that went to somebody who was married to a wine merchant and had been working at the White House or something, so I didn't get it And my CDO (Career Development Officer) called, he said, "Well, Gregg, you know, you were runner up for Bordeaux." But it's not like a golf tournament where you win $70,000, it's like send us some more bids, you know." So anyway, that was really the only job I wanted, per se. So I just concentrated -- and I ended up going to the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, which is the least desirable of the war colleges only because it's in the middle of Alabama, I guess, and it's not as known, well known as Naval or particularly Army, and of course National is the big one.. So that was pretty much -- I had a choice between that and being the State Department person at the Heritage Foundation. And I thought, "Well gee, that's a right-wing think tank, that'd be kind of interesting, you know. I might make some good contacts there and stuff like that, but on the other hand, they hate the State Department. And I would be the resident whipping boy probably for the entire State Department and what's -- what's that going to get me, you know?" It would be interesting, but you know. But the War College, you know, sounded like something that was actually of some use. And you know, I'm a

Midwestern guy, so you know, I thought in the middle of Alabama, you know, why not? And so, so that's, that's where I ended up.

Q: You did that from when to when?

FROST: From -- it was an academic year. It was June -- August '91 to June '92.

Q: All right. What was your first impression of -- talk a bit about the Air War College, sort of the physical structure and then how it was constituted, the class.

FROST: It's at a place called Maxwell Air Force Base in, in Montgomery, Alabama, which is the state capital. Nice little midsized city, kind of like Des Moines, Iowa. Very comfortable, good place, nice place. At Maxwell Air Force Base, they had they have a squadron of National Guard C130's, but otherwise it's not an air base per se, except for that one squadron, which is kind of a nominal, you know, occupant there. But it's called Air University, and unlike the other services, the Air Force has all its major schools in this one place at Maxwell Air Base, aka (also known as) Air University. You have the Squadron Officers' School for, for Captains, the Air Command and Staff College for majors and the Air War College for Lieutenant Colonels. And then you have the JAG School and the Civil Air Patrol School, and some other more specialized units and schools. So it's kind of like a college campus, except that everybody wears a uniform except for the few civilians that are there. You know, either the faculty members and the, and the, and the students and the instructors and the students, you know, that they have the -- like War College has students. And so the War College had about -- I think it had about 250 students, so it had like 20 seminar groups of 12. In each predominantly Air Force Officers, but after the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act in '86 the air colleges were -- they would send other officers, other services to the other war colleges. So you had -- we even had one Coast Guard. You had some naval officers, army officers, and stuff. So each seminar has -- you usually would have like maybe, typically say, say nine Air Force Officers, one civilian, one International Officer, and one other service officer. So you know, and they were just kind of split that way, you know. So you know, and you had large lectures, but you also had these seminar discussion groups and stuff like that. So it was -- and the curriculum was national security studies, military studies, military history, management, you know.

Q: I know people who've gone to some of the war colleges found that as a State Department representative there they often were almost a resource rather than -- I mean people said, "Well, what does the State Department," -- you know, I mean you're the person who can talk about foreign policy.

FROST: That was -- yeah, that was, that was, that was true. And they had kind of a slot for a Foreign Service Officer, kind of an instructor, an advisor person on the staff there. And there, you know, a lot of State Department people running around the National War College because it's in Washington, you know. But I mean the position was vacant the year I was there, which kind of -- I would have liked to have filled it, but you know, but I, I had to study, you know, so I couldn't really do a lot -- as much as I wanted to because it

was a full time -- you know, I mean going back to school when you're like 40-years-old, you know, is a lot harder than I thought it would be, you know? And it wasn't hard, but I mean it was, it was, you know, I wasn't used to it, you know. So but yeah, you're right. I mean you, you feel like you're representing the State Department, and you know, I was the only one there at the time, the only State Department student.

Q: Well, how did you find sort of the attitude of -- I mean the Gulf War just happened --

FROST: Yeah, it was a really interesting time. Because like there was a guy that flew in our class who flew the first F1-17 over Baghdad to take out their air defenses, you know, and he was right there in the class.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And of course when we started the, when we started the year it was a Soviet Union, and when the year ended there wasn't a Soviet Union. And that was, that was fascinating because the world was in a great state of flux, you know. And they had, they had devised kind of a new curriculum, which was a -- unit in the curriculum, which is kind of a, you know, know your enemy, a multi-discipline approach to the USSR, something like that. Well, that was scrubbed immediately because the USSR was already going away. So you know, the curriculum's already changing on the fly and it's very much a transition period, both in, in the military and then, you know, everything. And then we were flush from victory at the -- in the Gulf War, you know, and it was -- and it was -- air power really won the war.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so that was, that was, that was just a fascinating time, you know. And the New World Order as it was once, you know, before it became the New World *Dis*order it was very much the thing. And Clinton was elected the fall after our class graduated. So George W. Bush was pres -- I mean George H.W. was president.

Q: Were they studying Vietnam, for example?

FROST: Yes, we had --

Q: And what was sort of the attitude towards that?

FROST: We had an interesting -- the first tri -- there were three trimesters. And the first trimester, which was really probably the most fun and interesting for most of us I think, including me, was called military studies, but was also colloquially known as "the war of the week," because basically we started off with Thucydides and Clausewitz and Jomini and all the classics of military theory and studies and stuff like that. And, and then just did a chronological, you know, tour of all the wars basically, you know. And Vietnam of course was I guess what it had been -- I guess it had been, let's see, I guess we left in '75. So when we started it had been 16 years since it was over. But it was still in people's

minds. And of course people pointed out that, you know, Viet -- we kicked the Vietnam problem, by winning that -- the Gulf War, you know, and sort of kind of redeemed ourselves in that sense. It was -- people pointed out that, you know, the disastrous hostage message rescue mission in Iran was called "Desert 1" and this was called "Desert Storm." So you know, sort of like we're going to do it right this time kind of thing. And so it was a lot of -- but, but there was a lot of interesting discussion about the murky threats of the future and, and you know, non-state actors and, you know, there were a lot of thinking about what the reality was to become.

Q: Well, what about let's say World War II. You know, there's a strategic survey that was done as far as their role in the Air Force.

FROST: Let me back up to Vietnam a little bit because there was something interesting there. We had a panel one day in the auditorium of -- they had Walt Rostow and one of the air commanders, retired Air Force General, and let's see, someone else. I don't know. But it was a panel on Vietnam. And Walt Rostow, you know, at the time was down at University of Texas.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Writing his ultra -- what I considered his ultra-revisionist history of Vietnam, is that gee, you know, when you -- when you really look at it now, you know, we won that war because the, the long term outcome was that all those countries that were supposed to be dominos that were going to fall have now become Asian tiger success stories.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Like Thailand is, you know, is a growing concern and, and, and Vietnam itself now of course. And so actually we won! *(laughs)* And it's sort of like, you know, give me a break. But of course the officers were always so much preoccupied with their honor and stuff like that and always question is, "Well, why didn't you resign if you were against this?" you know, if you thought it was a bad idea, you know. And "I would have resigned, you know." This kind of, you know -- that was kind of the attitude I think in a way of the officers. And of course -- and we had -- we had I think it was, I think it was general -- I think it was the general that was, that was in charge of the -- the Marine General in charge of the famous left hook thing in, in, in, in the Gulf War.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: Under Schwarzkopf that did the kind of flanking movement and stuff like that. And he came in and he said, he said, "I'm so Goddamn sick of these young officers today, you know, you guys think that, that, you know, that the press lost -- press lost the war for us and, you know, all this stuff is bullshit. You know, *we* lost the war and we need to recognize that." *(laughs)* You know. And so it, it was, it was, it was still all live – a live wire, but the bombing campaign is a very interesting subject, we -- because in the

‘30s, that’s where the whole strategic bombing campaign of World War II was, was conceived—“Maxwell Field”, as it was called back then.

Q: Well, there was --

FROST: Called Maxwell Field. And this was -- it was called the Army Air Corps Tactical School, which later became the Air War College..

Q: Well, there was an Italian --

FROST: Douhet---Giulio Douhet.

Q: Right --

FROST: “The bombers will get through” is what Douhet said, yeah. And we studied all those guys, you know, and I learned a heck of a lot about air power, I can tell you. But it was --so it was kind of, it was kind of the cradle of air power thinking for the United States, you know. And, and -- but, but -- and there’s this famous strategic bombing survey. They did a strategic bombing survey of the Gulf War as well, by the way, modeled very consciously on the original one for World War II. But in my opinion the -- this is a personal opinion, but I think a lot of people probably share it, and that is that, is that the strategic bombing campaign of World War II -- this is a dirty little secret that many Air Force Officers know deep in their heart and soul, but don’t -- it’s not talked about because it’s kind of a shibboleth, you know. It was a colossal, massive failure and a lot of airmen, 8,000 people, lost their lives with very little to show for it, you know. And the reason is because I think that the technology wasn’t really there to accomplish it, you know, and you know, the Norden bombsight, you know, this famous Norden bombsight they used...

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Well, I mean you have pilots who say well, crap, you know, once you -- once the first plane drops its bombs it’s just smoke, you can’t see anything, you can’t aim anything. So you know, precision bombing my eye, you know.

Q: Well --

FROST: And it took -- just the mere mathematics of it. You know, you have this -- you have the, you know, if you’re, you know, it’s the geometric proportion, you know, one third, one ninth, one sixteenth, you know, as you get further from the target -- as you miss the target further, you know, the damage is, is squared -- I mean the damage is the inverse square of what you would do if you were that much closer. So it’s just -- you know, it’s just -- and you read Albert Speer’s book if you’ve ever read that, you know. He “Well basically, you know, they massively bomb target A one day and maybe do some serious damage, but then you massively bomb target B the next day and we send of all our teams to aid and repair it while you’re bombing B and then they move over to C the next time,

the day after that." Because they couldn't -- they didn't have enough -- you know, they had to saturate -- even saturation bombing they didn't have enough to cover, you know, all, you know, all the targets all the time, which is what, what they -- what they later did in the Gulf War, which is why it succeeded so well. But the precision bombing they we had later -- but that's another story and I'll talk about that later because I've got a place to talk about it, so.

Q: Well, yeah. Did you find that -- how were the Air Force, because they were going to be the people to deliver nuclear weapons?

FROST: What about them?

Q: How do they view this? I mean was there a consensus or a concern or what regarding -- we're talking about missile delivery systems and all.

FROST: No, I don't think it was -- it really wasn't something that I remember hearing or talking a lot about. I mean we covered it, you know, sort of perfunctorily in various parts of the curriculum. But you know, we had a, we had a civilian guy that was one of these really nerdy -- brilliant but nerdy and odd guys that taught us, you know, about, you know, the whole thing of Kissinger and deterrence and, and, and mutually assured destruction and that insane kind of, you know, but the idea was it's just sort of this esoteric little area that --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- that people had --

Q: Well, in a way when you talk about nuclear exchanges you're talking about something so horrible and so obviously non-productive, which is almost the wrong word to use, but militarily non-productive that you almost have to -- I mean there's not much to talk about.

FROST: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's true. And of course the Soviet Union was, was, you know, going, going, gone at that point.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, and they were the main threat for this stuff. So it was even less, you know. And nobody knew how that was all going to turn out in terms of the nukes, where they were going to, you know, end up and just, you know, all that kind of stuff. So it was sort of -- there was not a whole lot of -- probably, probably a certain amount of relief that that threat such as it was, was not once it once was.

Q: Well, I would think, particularly coming out of the Gulf War, you probably hit the Air War College at a real high.

FROST: Yeah, for sure.

Q: We're the guys that can do the job.

FROST: Yeah, yeah, for sure.

Q: Did you pick up any feeling towards the naval era?

FROST: Let's see. Well, yeah, we had some -- we had naval officers and they were pretty much all naval aviators as you would imagine at the Air War College. But no, it's -- my memory of that is kind of -- it's kind of vague. I don't know. We studied that stuff in World War II mainly of course as the campaign in the Pacific and stuff. But you know, because there was -- I learned about the -- in the '30s while the strategic bombing campaign was being conceived and planned in Maxwell Field, you know, the, the Naval War College -- of course they didn't have an Air War College, they didn't have an Air Force, but the Naval War College was having an annual exercise called Case Orange where they were game planning what was going to happen with Japan.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You probably read about that.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: That was kind of interesting, you know. That was one of the things we covered in the -- we had a -- we had a -- read a book about it, you know, and how the --

Q: As a kid, I was growing up in Annapolis. My brother was ten years ahead of me, was a naval aviator. But looking back on that, it's a damn good thing the Case Orange didn't come up because I think probably the Japanese Navy at that particular time could have really hurt our Navy more than we would have hurt their navy.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: As time went on it become -- the advantages came on our side.

FROST: You mentioned the Navy. Yeah, you know, it's interesting to see the kind of, kind of mentality of the different services, you know. I remember we, we did some reading on that subject, you know, and the fact that the Air Force is into toys, you know, you know, the planes and flying them and stuff like that, you know. And technology. You know, that's kind of where they're, where they're into, you know, and also the knighthood concept of the pilot.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Which is being called into question now with these drones and stuff like that, you know. I had -- I had a civilian instructor who'd previously been instructor at the, at the Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, you know, which is a real temple of military thought in many ways, and he said, "Well, in the Army, you know, a pilot is called -- they're called Warrant Officers. They're not officer-officers. Officers should command man and troops and, and, and units and stuff like that. They shouldn't be flying planes around. They should be Warrant Officers. Not really officers in the army sense at all, you know." And, and but you know, that's the knighthood concept of the pilot, you know, and the Red Baron and all that going, you know, still kind of very much alive. And then you got the, the navy is tradition, you know, I remember there's, you know, the famous Alfred Thayer Mahan and his theory of sea power and all this stuff, you know. And I -- there was some great quote that said something about some guy working in the Navy Department said, "I felt like I descended into a mysterious realm where, you know, Neptune was on the throne and Mahan was his prophet and," you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Just sort of tradition, tradition, tradition, you know, and the facts that the pilots are -- there's the Black Shoe Navy and there's the Brown Shoe Navy, because the pilots for some reason always wore brown shoes.

Q: They did, I remember this at the naval -- living in Annapolis --

FROST: Uh-huh, yeah.

Q: -- become very much aware of -- they even had a different uniform at one time, a green uniform. It wasn't worn much, but there was a green uniform.

FROST: Uh-huh, yeah. So and it was interesting that the -- I mean -- so I just loved that year. I had a -- I had a French -- the French officer happened to be in my seminar the first trimester and later became chief -- I looked him up and at some point was Chief of Staff of French Air Force. And then we had a couple Israelis, you know, and one of them was a C130 pilot, you know, a C130 guy and was saying, "Imagine, you know, when you, when you take off from your home air field and you're with -- immediately within range of enemy SAM missiles, you know. Imagine that, you know, taking off from Montgomery and all of a sudden you know that they could shoot you down right here, you know."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: That's, "that's the way we live in Israel, you know." he says. *(laughs).* And it was -- I mean I was pretty impressed with the Air Force and -- or the military overall. I mean they call this professional military education, PME, you know, and they have -- like I say, they have in the case of the Air Force, Squadron Officer School and, and, and the Air Command Staff College, Air War College -- whole continuum of during your career

you're expected to, you know, and you get -- you, you, you can be -- without hardly ever wanting to you end up with a master's degree in something, you know, before you --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- top out in the Air Force. And a lot of it is just to show that they are not dumb guys that just shoot people and kill people and break things, as they say, you know, and there's a little bit, you know, maybe insecurity about, you know, military people are not known as intellectuals generally in the same way that say, Foreign Service Officers are and so forth, you know. But I mean still they value -- institutionally they value education. They have professional reading lists, you know, and, and, and, and -- whereas State Department, what do we talk about? "Training." What's train -- to -- you know, when you say training a military guy it means, it sort of translates to two things, you know, it's either highly technical or it's enlisted stuff. Whereas "education" is a broadening of the mind and, you know, new ideas and stuff like that. So I felt actually -- I think the Military, there's far more honest debate, disagreement about things that matter, professional things than I ever saw at the State Department -- I mean and boy, if you went up there on the stage at the Air War College, you know, with 250 students out there, you know, you better know what the hell you're talking about or you get ripped apart. I mean not rudely per se, but very pointedly, you know. And, and, and you know, I saw, I saw that happen a couple of times. Some of these guys -- I mean nobody booed or anybody, but you could tell that they were -- they were booing in their minds, you know, it's like you come here, you half-ass lecture, you know, what the hell is this, you know? And, and that was kind of, you know, you can be honest, I think, there's more -- where in the State Department you, you know, you give lip service to the policy and then you undermine it, you know, under the table, so to speak, you know, whereas in, in, in the Military, you know, there's -- they have shouting matches and arguments. It's not completely out of bounds that you could have a, you know, senior enlisted man come up to the Colonel and say, you know, "Frankly Colonel, I think you're full of it here, you know, and you're wrong." And the Colonel would hear him out. Then if, if the Colonel still wants to proceed, he will tell him that he's made his decision and he has to carry it out. And the guy will salute and he'll do it. He won't backstab and he won't try to undermine it. And I like that, you know. I mean it --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- gave me a whole new appreciation and respect for the Military. That you know, for example, our Secretary of State at the time, Mrs. Albright, didn't seem to have, you know, she just sort of had the idea, "Well gee, if I -- I'd be really be terrified if people came at me with guns, so we just go in and we terrify the hell out of these bad people and they'll go away."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: No! They won't! *(laughs)* So…

Q: Well, I think this probably is a good place to stop.

FROST: OK.

Q: Where did you go after?

FROST: After that I thought it was time to get back to more Consular stuff. It would have been nice if somebody had called me to offer a military-related job, but I didn't really have the experience and I was not a Political Officer. So I, I ended up bidding on and getting the Principal Officership in Hermosillo, Mexico.

Q: All right.

FROST: Back to Mexico.

Q: OK. Today is the 5th of April, 2012 with Gregory Frost…when we left you, you were coming out of the Air War College, weren't you? --

FROST: And going to Hermosillo, Mexico to be Principal Officer.

Q: All right. Well, let's talk about Hermosillo.

FROST: All right, well it's, it's kind of a border post and kind of not because it's inland; it's not really on the border. The border town is Nogales, Sonora/Arizona. Hermosillo's the state capital and it's about – It's 170 miles from Hermosillo to the border and another 43 northwards to Tucson. So it's, you know, in a border state, very much, you know, related to the border, -- and our district covered the border, all across the Arizona -- Sonora is the only Mexican Border state that has a border with only one US state-- there's Arizona and Sonora below it. I mean they're kind of a match-up as far as their width is concerned.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And you know, it extends southwards from, from there. So it -- that's kind of the -- the Sonora Desert, you know it's about 100° there. It's a dry heat, as they say, but it's still really hot. And it's a fascinating -- Sonora has -- is kind of a diverse state. They have mining, they have cattle, wheat growing, fishing, manufacturing. They have a little of everything, it's very diverse and it's very prosperous by Mexican standards, you know. And sort of like think that they're, you know, practically this -- as wealthy as Arizona, and that's of course not true, but by Mexican standards they're, they're very, very middle class and, and, and prosperous. And they kind of -- but they kind of think they should -- you know, they kind of almost think of themselves as their own country in certain ways, you know. And of course they're far removed from the center of Mexican politics in Mexico City as all border areas are.

Q: Well, when were you there?

FROST: I was there from August ’92 to June ’94, so just not quite two years. So I, I curtailed by a year, but that’s a story I’ll tell sort of towards the end, I guess, but that’s when I was there.

Q: What were the politics of Sonora?

FROST: Well, they, you know, they were the -- of course that was still in the days of the PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party, which had ruled Mexico as a, as a sort of de facto one-party state for like 70 years, over 70 years. Maybe not quite 70 years, but close. And, and so it was kind of part and parcel of the way that Mexico was.

Q: Well, were you feeling that Mexico, at least Sonora was on the brink of, you know, opening up a bit? Because it did by 2000, didn’t it?

FROST: Yeah, very much so. They had, they had these twin plant operations, you know, so called “twin plants,” maquiladoras, you know, which were American investments in manufacturing in Hermosillo and other points further north, Nogales, a lot of them were more closer to the border for obvious reasons. They didn’t -- somehow they -- they had a governor who kind of -- they called him the, the, you know, the old PRI people were then becoming known as dinosaurs, dinosaurios, you know, which they kind of were. The one party, you know, revolving door, same group of guys kind of system. And the Governor of Sonora I think maybe recognized that winds of change were blowing. And he was a very young, dynamic, handsome charismatic sort of guy, and he was referred to as a “babysaur.” In other words, he was, he was like a dinosaur, but he was -- they were kind of trying to recast themselves as being more populist and so forth. Survive, you know, the challenge from the right wing, right of center, PAN (Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)), Acción Nacional Party, which was making lots of -- they won a governor -- I think they won a governorship of Baja California earlier. A guy that I knew when I was there, one of my contacts in Tijuana was the elected Governor of Baja California. So winds of change of blowing and they were trying to kind of -- trying to reinvent themselves, so to speak, to assist him, you know. But everything has changed, very much so, you know?

Q: But were you feeling the impact at the, the North American Trade Agreement?

FROST: Very much.

Q: Had that -- I can’t remember when -- that was affected about the time you were there, was --

FROST: That was, that was the -- yeah, that was -- it was, it was, it was approved by Congress during my stay there. So it was very much issue one through five, at least, of U.S.-Mexican relations during my tenure there. And of course everybody but everybody on the Mexican side was in favor of it. I mean it was like -- and it -- up to the point where sort of like if the Congress didn’t have it we’d have some serious problems with Mexico,

because they would have seen it as -- they would have taken it kind of personally, a slap in the face that you're not considering us worthy partners and so forth. And of course this was when -- this was when Salinas was president, you know. And he's kind of the high water mark. There was one more, one more PRI president after him, before the, the PAN won their first victory in the presidential election. But he would, I would say, the high water mark of the old system. But he was also casting himself as very progressive and, you know, free trade and, and, and so forth. Mexico has a very protectionist history, especially vis-à-vis the U.S. and they had trouble kind of really giving that up. But they recognized that they kind of had to or at least as much as they could, but most of it had to go, you know, because of the relationship with the U.S. and --

Q: Well, describe your post.

FROST: Well, it was, it was, it was -- like most posts in the -- the consular posts in Mexico, generally speaking as far as the State Department presence were just visa mills and American Citizen Service posts. In other words, it was consular. It wasn't in -- there weren't any Political Officers, any Econ Officers. We just kind of did that part time, myself and the FSO's under me. There were -- I had a Deputy and, and two Vice Consuls. And, and an OMS (Office Management Specialist), State Department OMS, because there was limited classified communications and so forth. So -- and then there was, there was one guy from the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, APHIS, of the Department of Agriculture who, you know, who ran these programs to keep bad agricultural pests out of the U.S., you know, riding in on tomatoes and the like. There was a U.S. Customs Office with two officers. And I guess we did -- I mean it was kind of part of the consular side, but we had a -- two employees of the Social Security Administration that did federal benefits, you know, and social security checks and claims and stuff, investigations for fraud and stuff like that. And then we had a fairly large, I think five- agent DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) presence, five-agent office of the DEA, because it was a transit area for drugs of course, even then, but not to the extent that it became. But so it was, it was really kind of almost dominated in some ways by the other agencies. You know, we got along with them well and, you know, there wasn't any real friction with them that I can think of during my stay there. But that was what the post was like.

Q: How was the non-immigrant load?

FROST: It was -- it was manageable, it was steady. I can't remember what the numbers were but it was, it was easily manageable with the resources that we had. And you know, you didn't have a lot of people that were not local applying. It was a lot less of a magnet than, than say Tijuana was for people coming up from the interior heading for California. Of course, Arizona, prosperous as it was, was not a big destination then. While I was there they first started building heavy fences along the border to keep, to keep - make it harder for people to cross. And they started -- they built a really pretty heavy -- they took some excess landing mat from the, from the military and built the first really ugly looking but somewhat affective fence in the -- sort of in the Tijuana-San Diego area, kind of extended that across and then in -- they were, they were basically fencing the border in, in

the major city areas, in like Nogales they were building a fence there in the urban zone. The desert, you know, I mean it was a desert, so they couldn't really fence -- it wasn't very practical to have a fence all the way across and they weren't really even trying to do that. But they were, they were stepping up border enforcement and so forth. And of course the, the fence was a contentious issue. The Mexicans called it *El Muro de Berlín*, "The Berlin Wall," and they were very much opposed to it.

The party line, which I had no problem with at all and always took when I was asked about it was that -- and it's true -- you know, there was a lot of certain truth in it, in that, in that, you know, the border kind of breeds crime. In, in a sense that you can steal something in the U.S. and dip back over and no -- and, and then say you can't get me, I'm over here, you know. And, and it was -- we were protecting people on both sides by decreasing crime on the border. And, and then we weren't trying to keep -- I mean yes, we were trying to keep people out, but I mean we weren't trying to make the border airtight or seal it or anything like that. But of course a lot of Mexicans considered a right to cross illegally or legally any way they could. There was a troublesome Mayor of Nogales, Arizona, local Hispanic guy named who owned the two McDonald's franchises that were there. And he claimed, well, "Oh, these kids, these Mexican kids just cross to eat my Big Macs and so they're taking away my business." And I didn't -- that could be true, but I mean it's a lot of effort to go through to, to run, run, run from the border patrol just to get yourself a Big Mac, you know. But he was very much politically, you know, was starting to stir people up against it, against the idea of the fence and, and, and so forth. And so it was, it was, it was kind of a -- it was a contentious issue at the, at the time.

They had started it by -- there was something called "Operation Blockade," which is not a term that the Mexicans liked. Apparently at the end of the fiscal year, I think it must have been like '93 maybe, or maybe '92, they had a lot of -- the border patrol had a lot of money leftover at the end of the fiscal year, in September, you know. So they decided they were going to place -- and this is in El Paso, where of course there's the river, which they didn't have a river in, in Arizona. But the Rio Grande was there in El Paso. And they basically all along a U.S. side on the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez area, they put a Border Patrol agent every 400 yards. So you could basically see the next guy -- they could look down, see the guy on your right, see the guy on your left, and have a visible barrier there, you know. And the, the crossers were kind of flummoxed by this because they thought, you know, gee, I mean, I, you know, 400 yards isn't very hard to run, or 200 yards, or however, you know -- so, so if you just kind of stop, stop crossing dead to a point where they had this overtime they were paying people. That's why I say the money, they had -- they were able to do this intense operation called "Blockade," because they had all this money to pay the agents overtime. And it got to the point though, it was so successful initially, that they, that they -- they, they took all their agents from the airport because it's no, you know, people would run to the airport and get a flight to -- they'd go to Tucson and, and, and get on a flight to Chicago or somewhere else.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, and they couldn't get that far because they weren't making it across, you know. Not Tucson, I'm sorry, El Paso, you know. That's where it was, El Paso. Excuse me. And so they couldn't -- they, they couldn't get that far. So they could take those agents that they used to cover inland and intensify even more. And it was very successful. It couldn't sustain that intensity, but they ended up -- they made it -- it was a, it was a different kind of a forward strategy. Instead of waiting for them to cross over and then getting them there, they were not -- they were deploying their forces forward, so to speak. And then the permanent version was called, "Operation Hold the Line," which was a little bit less offensive than "blockade," but nevertheless, not very friendly sounding. So you know, it was a little bit -- I mean I didn't have any -- it wasn't really like nasty, personal kind of stuff, but you know, when I would go out in public -- and this is just part of the way the Mexicans are, and I love them dearly -- but it was, it was kind of like they would -- you know, when I would go out in public some journalist would invariably come up and stick a microphone in front of my face and say -- it was sort of like the tone of the conversation was, "Senior Consul, what's your comment on the latest nasty thing that your country has deliberately done to ours?" You know, and it's sort of like, "When did you stop beating your wife?" All the questions were fully loaded.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know. And so I didn't have any problem dealing with that, it didn't make me mad or anything, you know, and that was my job. But the thing was I got very little in the way of, of ammunition from, you know, talking points, you know, the party line, I, mainly knew it because I'd read it in the papers. And I --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So far from Mexico City, we were sort of on our own, you know, up on the border. You know, I'm sure this was true of the other posts too. And so I just kind of winged it, you know, and I kind of, kind of improvised and freelanced. I never heard from -- John Negroponte was the ambassador at the time in Mexico City, but I never heard anything from him, I didn't hear anything from the Consul General down there who was my boss, I didn't hear anything from the public affairs people down there about anything I said. I didn't watch TV because I didn't think I'd probably look very good. I better not watch it. But I was -- there was a channel called "Canal Doce," Channel 12, who was -- which was, I thought, just a local outlet, you know. And so I -- they were always asking me for comment and I would give them one. And if I didn't, if I didn't know what I was supposed to say I just kind of made something up and I don't know, it was probably on -- in the right -- in the ballpark, you know, so to speak. And I didn't think a thing of it. And, and so it was kind of funny because like when Negroponte visited once -- he paid a visit to the post when I was there and I met him at the airport and so forth and took him around. And I said to him -- and this -- and I said, I said, "I'm not really full of myself, you know, making this up, but it's like, you know, in terms of the, the priority order of important sound bites in the state of Sonora, number one is the governor, the state governor, of course, Beltrones, number two is the Archbishop, number three is El Señor Consul, and I'm not making this up. I would be asked about domestic

AIDS policy and all sorts of stuff that, you know, I shouldn't be commenting on because it's none of my business really. But that was, you know, besides the usual issues about the wall and, and, and border issues and so forth. And I mean you kind of -- you're king of the desert, you know. It was kind of in the, kind of a cool job because it was sort of like, you know, I had a -- some years ago there was kind of a folkloric Foreign Service incident. I don't' remember it at the time for some reason. It wasn't as famous as the guy that killed his, his partner in Equatorial Guinea, you might remember, but it was of a piece with that, I guess, kind of legendary. There was a Vice Consul that was kidnapped for ransom.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And nobody paid and he was killed. And I've heard a -- I've heard a, a story of, you know, an unconfirmed but well sourced story as to what happened, which I won't repeat here because it's not really -- it was -- there was never any charges or anything and it was basically un -- unresolved crime, you know, unresolved, the guy was dead. And this was a long before there was really very a whole lot of border violence and, and drug violence. I mean it was just beginning. But after that, somehow the post, because there was all this spotlight, they, they'd made a rule that, that I had this in writing from the RSO (Regional Security Officer) in Mexico City. I could use my official suburban -- I'm not sure whether it was armored, I don't think so, but my official suburban with my Mexican driver and a bodyguard for any business -- anywhere I needed to go, including personal business I was allowed to use that, you know. And I didn't a lot -- most of the time because I didn't think it was that dangerous and I didn't want my family life to be disrupted and I had a minivan and, you know, and, and three kids. So I didn't -- my predecessor would have -- he was kind of got into the role I think to an extent more than I did, would have his -- he'd have -- when he went to Tucson like for a weekend, like we all did to shop and go to movies and stuff, he would -- he would have the bodyguard and the driver escort him to the border behind in a follow car, you know, in his own -- he'd be in his own personal car. And then they'd turn around and go back. And they'd meet him there on -- for the escort back home. But I thought that was kind of unnecessary and ridiculous, so I didn't, I didn't do that. But it was kind of nice to have, you know, it felt like a -- if I wanted -- every time I -- if I wanted to travel like a drug lord I sure could, you know *(laughs).* And you know, my bodyguard had a gun. I'm not quite sure whether -- what the legality of all that was. But I didn't ask.

Q: But they --

FROST: Nobody told, so.

Q: But the drug lords weren't running around shooting.

FROST: No, they were not, they were not. There was, there was a very notorious one, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, known as "Lord of the Skies," who had a revolutionary new tactic where he would, he would buy these old French Caravelle passenger jets and, and load them up with cocaine and maybe all the way -- maybe as far as -- no, it wasn't --

they could have come all the way from Colombia. They didn't have that kind of range anyway. But they would them in the desert in Arizona and, and, you know, they'd be met by the -- by his minions and off the drugs would go. Or maybe they crashed them in Sonora and then, and then, and then take the stuff overland I guess, but they would -- they would, they would -- he was called Lord of the Skies. He was -- and he, his house was -- he had a house that was right around the corner from me, you know. Never saw him. I don't think he was hardly ever there. But that's where -- he -- that was one of his residences apparently, you know. Then you had the Head of the Federal Highway Patrol right across the street from us in a house that he possibly couldn't have afford and that was nicer than mine, nicer than the residents.

Q: Well --

FROST: So it was, it was Wild West.

Q: Was it a dangerous place for an American tourist who wanted to go, say to Mexico City to drive through?

FROST: No, it wasn't. Now, mind you, mind you, if you really were going to Mexico City you were usually over in Laredo, Nuevo Laredo, that was the main highway. The main pathway into the interior. Because if you look at the map you see we -- south of us is Mazatlán and Porto Vallarta, the Pacific Coast really. It's the Pacific Coast road mind you, you know, ultimately Acapulco and stuff.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: But no, it wasn't -- except in, in -- there was -- the state south of us, which was, which was -- there was a consulate in Mazatlán that closed while I was there.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And it was responsible for the state of Sinaloa, which became part of our district when it, when Mazatlán closed. They kept the building and the DEA still operated out of the old consulate, but they were alone. There was no State Department presence anymore, just a DEA office, kind of, kind of exposed in a way. You, you know, and that, that's because they didn't have the cover of the consulate. But they kept operations there. Because it was a big -- it was a big cocaine and other drug -- it was a, it was a narco-state, Sinaloa was. Culiacán was the capital, which was known colloquially as "Little Medellin," because it was just completely in the thrall -- it was, it was not a safe place. So when I went down there on an official visit, the Sinaloa State Police, or maybe it was the Federal Highway Patrol, met me at the border of Sinaloa and escorted all the way into Culiacán, you know, driving my own personal car because I was combining businesses with pleasure at the time and had my family with me and stuff. But yeah, I -- because it was not, it was not very safe. And there was a deserted stretch of road along the coast down there in Sinaloa where several years earlier there had been an American woman who was driving down there and was attacked. And I'm not sure what -- she might have

been killed, I think even. This was just a few years before. And it's funny, my -- we, we -- they have this country consular information sheet on Mexico, which talks about the dangerous places and stuff to avoid, and things to do and not to do, etc., covering the whole country and all the consulates were asked for input. And they were updating it. So my deputy arrived -- arrived exactly around the time I did -- and we were working on this. And we -- this incident was, you know, everybody remembered it, it was in the institutional memory, this American being attacked and killed on this sort of desolate stretch of road down in Sinaloa, you know, probably just a plain old robbery, you know. So we sort -- I said, "Don, you know, I'm uncomfortable with this because you look at the consular info sheet and there's a general warning about the dangers of being on the roads at night, etc. but there's not one other mention of a specific stretch of road that's dangerous or that you should avoid, except the one in our territory. And do you really think that's the most dangerous place in all of Mexico for people -- Americans to drive? Do you think it's more dangerous, say, then these other places that were kind of known but not mentioned as being bad places to drive in, you know?" So I said, "I don't -- I feel like maybe -- and this happened a few years ago, it's an isolated incident, hasn't happened again, you know. So maybe we should take that out." And, and like -- it seems like two weeks -- within two weeks another American had been held up at gunpoint and robbed by bandits on that road. So we said, "Well, I guess we better keep that for another couple more years anyway. Maybe it is more dangerous there, you know. So let's not take it out." So that's -- but Sinaloa was, was, was, was a different kettle of fish than Sonora as a state.

Q: Who came to your consular district from the United States? I mean was this where high school kids or what?

FROST: Well, more people came to Nogales, right across the border, because there was really not a great reason to go inland -- I mean there were some nice beaches and stuff down there, Guaymas and that area. There was a nice resort town with a starred hotel called San Carlos, which was over by Guaymas. But that was a fairly long drive to come, you know. And of course the more you get -- there, there was not a coast that went further south---just the main road to Sinaloa that right smack dab through the main state but lot along the coast southwards. But you had to cut over to get to the beaches, you know.

But the Sea of Cortez (Gulf of California was) shore was a nice area. There was a place called Porto Penasco, also -- known in English as Rocky Port on the Sea of Cortez sort of to the northwest of us closer to the border. And that was kind of known as "Arizona's Beach." That was the place where the kids would come down for spring break in significant numbers and a lot of Americans owned retirement homes and second homes and vacation homes and stuff like that there in that area. And that was kind of an issue too because Mexico has this law that foreigners can not own property within a certain distance of the ocean and the coastline and within a certain distance of the border. That's prohibitive territory for foreigners to own property, you know, "Keep Mexico Mexican kind of thing," you know. And so they had -- the problem was that these American retirees would -- there was a real industry in this, they called them *prestanombres*, which

literally meant "name loaners." These were Mexican brokers who would say, "Well look, here's the deal. You bought -- I'll buy this property for you and, you know, I won't mess with you, you give me a fee every year, whatever. And it'll be -- but it'll be in my name but you'll be the owner in fact." And that's a recipe for theft and disaster.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

FROST: You know, you can imagine. So we had all these people over there that had been gypped out of their money and their homes and stuff by these sleazy Mexicans and, you know, wanted me and the U.S. government to do something about it.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And of course well, I'm in kind of -- the law's the law -- and I mean the true answer is the law's the law and you knew what you were getting yourself into and it was a stupid decision, you know. I, joke to my deputy, "We should have -- all we need to do is establish an 800 number for people who are thinking of doing this kind of thing, buying property in Mexico, you know, in those places. And we should say, 'Call our toll free number, 1-800-DON'T-DO-IT," *(laughs).*

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So it was kind of a -- it was sort of a public relations diplomatic thing. I wrote a letter to the governor and asked him to intervene, or the Chief Justice of State maybe, you know, who was a friend of mine. But I -- I mean I didn't really -- there wasn't really much we could do for these people and they were kind of -- they were pretty much in the wrong, so you know, we just kind of talked to and were sympathetic and, you know --

Q: Did you go down and have meetings with them?

FROST: I did, yeah, uh-huh, I did. I found -- while I was there I found, you know, this may be one of the people you interviewed. But do you remember a FSO named Oliver S. "Mike" Crosby who was --

Q: The name's familiar.

FROST: He was DCM in Lagos part of the time I was there, and later became Ambassador to Guinea, Oliver S. "Mike" Crosby, flinty New Englander with a wry sense of humor. Anyway, I met -- I met his wife's sister down there who was one of the retirees when I went down to meet these folks. And they had -- they, they would have -- there was also something called the Arizona-Sonora Commission. Well, it was kind of funny -- no, it wasn't -- there were twin commissions. The Sonorans had -- the Mexicans had a Sonora-Arizona Commission because to them I mean Arizona was the U.S. because I mean it's -- it fronted on them and they didn't really look beyond Arizona as far as trade and stuff like that very much. They were very provincial people, you know. And -- but the, the one in Arizona was called the Arizona-Mexico Commission, because Arizona

had ambitions far beyond the border, you know, beyond in the state of Sonora, in Mexico City for example were the real money was. You know, they were aiming at all of Mexico as a market. That was their vision, you know. So there was a little bit of asymmetry in this relationship. But there were some -- and we -- they had a border governors' conference also, which was all the border state governors on both sides. And that was held in Tucson, or Phoenix one year when I was there. And I attended that. There were those kind of -- those kind of bilateral meetings too.

Q: How about their officers? You know, going to a so-called border post often is considered a -- being sent to Siberia or something like that.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: How did you find that though for the officers?

FROST: I think, as I say, Hermosillo was only a semi-border post. And being in the interior in, in some ways made it better. It kind of cut through -- you weren't living amidst the sleaze --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- that usually happens in the border, as you were in Tijuana, as we -- I did in Tijuana , you know. But on the other hand it was very lonely and provincial because we were the only consulate there. The closest thing I had to a diplomatic colleague was there was a French guy who was -- they had a little outpost, the Alliance Française there. And since I was a French speaker he became a buddy of mine and I went to all of his events and he had dinner at our house and so forth, because he was the closest thing I had to a colleague, you know. So -- and the people were very friendly nice, but they were, they were kind of ingrown and provincial. It was a bit like *(phone rings)* -- I'm sorry, I'll turn this off.

Q: OK, well we're talking --

FROST: Where we were? Where --

Q: Well, we're talking about the people, the officers --

FROST: Yeah, and, and, and so it was -- like I say, the people were friendly, you know, you had access to the elite such as they were. There was very nice residential areas and houses, like I say it was a very prosperous middle classy kind of place, you know. And but not, not rich, rich, rich people, even, you know, the -- there were -- it was not a, a place where you had really opulent people.

Q: Probably just as well, I mean --

FROST: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah.

Q: These are not a necessarily nice people.

FROST: But the thing is that they -- they -- yeah, there weren't as many drug people at that time, like I say. And, and but this sort of like -- they -- their idea of a wild weekend -- not a wild weekend, but I mean what they would do -- they all had these Dodge Ramchargers and they would drive every month or so, thereabouts, they would drive to *Tuc*son, as they called it, 240, 50 miles, stayed at the Residence In and shop and be able to shop, you know, and come home in their Ramchargers. And that was kind of, you know, that was the extent of their universe. And so it's like they weren't, they weren't really international -- it wasn't international city and they weren't international people, friendly as they were. I think I might have told you this story sort of out of place before, but when, when, when we were leaving I -- my daughters went to a, a school there where there were 720 kids, like elementary level, and only -- they were the only two Gringos in the entire school, and it was a bilingual school, half of the curriculum was in English and half of it was in Spanish. And they went there cold with no Spanish and in -- in --

Q: How old were they?

FROST: They were, let's see, they were six -- let's see, '83 was the older one, so we came there -- my -- the elder one would have been when we arrived was nine and the other one would have been six.

Q: Uh-huh.

FROST: So, and they wouldn't cut them any slack. This was really the only school option. It was a place called the Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales, IMARC were the initials. And it was -- it had some very loose connection to the USIS (United States Information Services) empire. It, it didn't -- they maybe dumped a few books on them, but the didn't give them any support now. But they were one of these kind of upper crusty institutions, you know, the, the, the hoi polloi of Hermosillo would sign up these kids from birth to go to this school and, you know, it was very coveted. It wasn't all that great, you know, but it was -- but it was really the only, the only decent educational option there. And you know, it turned out to be a good experience for them. They really learned Spanish, you know.

Q: Yeah, well --

FROST: But the director wouldn't cut them any slack. They just got thrown in. They put them back a grade lower than they were in English in the Spanish section, they had -- which was kind of hard for them because it meant they were doing -- they were in two different classes at the same time, you know, the Spanish and the English because they -- I mean I could understand that and that was probably a good thing. But anyway, we had to work with them and we hired a tutor and, you know, so on and so forth. But I remember one of the, one of the parents -- one of the -- there was a nice family there that said they -- that had two sisters in it and they both about their ages respectively, so they

became friends, had sleepovers in each others houses in both directions and so forth, go home with each other after school and such. Very nice, very nice middle class family. And you know, it's funny, my youngest one, she was a perfect mimic. And so these kids spoke English a lot, but you know, there was an accent, you know, so my daughter started when he -- she talked other Mexican friends, "Can I go to your house today?" And she would kind of change her, change her, her English to talk like them, which is kind of -- which I got a kick out of.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And anyway, but I remember when we were -- I told these people when we were leaving, when we eventually left, it's sort of like, you know, "So where are you being transferred to Ciudad Obregon?" –a town further down, further downstate, you know, in Sonora.

And it's sort of like, "No, I don't think we have another second consulate in Sonora. We're lucky we have one, you know," *(laughs).* And that was kind of their, you know, their limited perspective, so you know, there wasn't much cultural life there, you know, and --

Q: How about Mexico City, our embassy? Was the hand of the embassy very heavy or not?

FROST: No, it wasn't. In fact, it probably could have been -- we probably would have liked it to have been a little bit heavier, because I mean we didn't get much in the way of administrative support from them, you know, and they didn't really -- you know, there are nine consulates in Mexico at the time and it's sort of like they'd get them all confused. And each one is -- you get to know them. This is very different from Tijuana, which is very different from -- in turn very different from Guadalajara and so forth, and they're all, they're all unique. They, they all have their own problems, their own situations. But they've just got to get all balled up and it's this great empire, you know. And so, you know, basically -- yeah, you're pretty much left alone, but sometimes you wish that they would give you a little, little better support, which was exactly the same in, in, in, in Tijuana. I mean I knew what I was getting into because I knew it was going to be the same in terms of the embassy relationship, and it was.

Q: I know Guadalajara has a substantial --

FROST: Retiree --

Q: -- American retiree --

FROST: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- place. As a matter of fact, my daughter's mother-in-law is there, living there.

FROST: Ours was very small.

Q: Huh?

FROST: Ours was very small.

Q: Your --

FROST: That made a dif -- that made them different from us, but --

Q: I would think it would make --

FROST: It does.

Q: Guadalajara --

FROST: Exactly.

Q: -- of course is a major city culturally and everything else. And the --

FROST: Also, before they consolidated all of this in Ciudad Juárez, they did immigrant visas in Guadalajara, because that's the major immigrant source country. The states surrounding Guadalajara was their -- is Michoacán and, and those states, which are the heavy immigrant source states, you know. And so yeah, that's a couple ways that they're different, or were different. But the -- one -- the only one time we really got -- and like I say, we got very little guidance and very little interest and one time my, my deputy -- I'd kind of caused a stir because I mean -- we probably should have cleared with this with the embassy, but we just went ahead and sent it. They had, they had a -- I think it was in Sinaloa, you know, they had a - -they had an incident where there was kind of a narco shootout and some innocent kid that was selling corn snacks on the street got gunned down because he got caught in the crossfire and stuff like that. And so, and so we, we wrote a little, little cable about this. I think it was unclassified or LOU (Limited Official Use) maybe or SBU (Sensitive But Unclassified) or something, but you know, and the, the title of the cable was, you know, "Narco Violence in Sinaloa. Out of control?" question mark, and we just sent it off to the department in all the Mexican coast, including the embassy, you know. And we had kind of a mild slap down for that because I mean people are so nervous about speaking the truth about Mexico, they were then and they are now it seems. About, you know -- the Mexicans of course would always react as if this -- I mean we're just reporting the facts here, you know. And maybe a little bit of their interpretation of it because it's, you know, when a little kid gets caught in the crossfire on this street of a downtown city --

Q: Yeah. Oh yeah.

FROST: -- you know, it's serious business.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, and so but we got kind of, you know, we, we should have probably toned it down or -- you know, we weren't being hysterical about it, we were just sort of raising the issue, you know.

Q: Well no, I -- this of course was an embassy, you know, the central government is breathing down their necks and --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- they're trying to make sure it sounds peaceful and all. And you know, things were slowly moving out of control there.

FROST: Yeah. Yeah. And the state -- you know, the Foreign Ministry in Mexico City is, is like, you know, they're -- they see themselves as the bastion of sovereignty and defender of Mexican independence, you know, versus these -- you know, the, the --

Q: Foreign Ministry -- it's traditionally been, you might say, I won't say the enemy, but --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- it is not the --

FROST: And they can't -- about licensing our cars and so forth, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: In, in, and, and, and, in, in, in -- back in the day there's kind of special rules. There's a 26-mile border zone where it's not quite Mexico, it's not quite the U.S., just kind of general --

Q: Uh-huh.

FROST: -- and you don't really -- the customs checkpoints are further inward. You know, you don't have much customs activity on the border on the Mexican side. You just wave through when you come in, you know. They don't search to see if you bought groceries in the States or brought them down or anything, you know. Didn't at the time anyway. And so -- but there's a -- there's a very -- the -- they would give you -- and you didn't have to, you know, the -- as long as you didn't go beyond the 26 miles you could take your car over from Arizona and back very easily, you know.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And wasn't a problem. But if you went to the interior you had to get a little sticker and it cost 100 bucks and, you know, if your car broke down and a mechanic

drove it, you know, while he was fixing it, they try to, you know, Mexican customs would seize your car and it was a racket and all this really nasty stuff. So you know, I joked -- I was joking with a Mexican friend one time. I said, "I got -- I need to make out a deal where, you know, we'll let X number of illegals come in and work for six months as long as they each are allowed to buy a car and drive it back to Mexico with the money that they earned," *(laughs),* because you're worried about people and you're worried about cars, you know?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And it was that kind of -- the old, the old Mexico was very protectionist, like I say, in every way. So it was, it was -- and like in, in Tijuana we had these -- a special deal with the state government in Baja California, where they would give us these special license plates. They were beautiful. They were like cast iron and they weighed about five or ten pounds it seemed like, and they were like this thick, you know, made out of cast iron. And they were, they were, they were a beautiful shade of baby blue with silver letters and it said, "Baja California Servicio Consular." Now we were the only "servicio consular" and we didn't -- and our cars continued to be registered in the States. We didn't have a registration to go with these things, we just had these plates. And nobody knew what they were and they left us alone, you know. We never got stopped or asked about them or anything, you know. Even in California I guess somehow. We had a -- I think we had a consulate give us a little paper explaining all this and with the seal on it or something and stuck it in a glove compartment. And I, I drove mine, you know, when I was going afterwards and I went back -- I went to Guinea for my next post, I drove it all the way across the U.S. and maybe even to Canada with these plates, you know. And so that was a little, you know, and in, in, in, in Hermosillo we had regular Sonora plates on our cars, which they just handed to us, you know. We didn't have to pay anything for them, you know, and they were, they were real regular --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: non-diplomatic plates. We didn't have to go through this SRE (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores) crap there, down, you know. And we didn't -- we, we, we weren't going to. And you know, we kind of worked out -- we had -- so there was a kind of -- there was, you know, it was -- the whole thing was at a distance at the -- now it's not that way anymore I don't think, but it was.

Q: How important was the church?

FROST: Well, let's see. Not really very important. I mean Mexico had -- has pretty strong anti-clerical --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Their revolution and everything. And the church was basically -- it used to be for many years the church was, you know, priests basically was -- it was -- I don't know

whether it was actually forbidden, but it just wasn't done to wear your priestly cassocks in public, you know. Outside of church.

Q: Yeah. There's a wonderful movie called "The Fugitive" with Henry Fonda about, about the killing of -- I mean the priests that were found were killed.

FROST: And of course the property -- most -- all of the church's property was taken away from it in the revolution, never given back, never compensated for really. And so the church was -- the -- you know, everybody was Catholic nominally, but it was pretty nominal in, in, in many respects with a lot of people. But the archbishop was a respected figure, just by virtue of being the archbishop, you know. I guess number two after the governor. And he was -- but there were -- while Salinas was president there was a concordat signed, the first ever formal agreement between the church and the Mexican state. And I'm not sure what the terms of it was. It wasn't a really bit deal. I mean it was reported on at the time. It wasn't like, you know, nobody -- there was not a -- it wasn't an issue, it just kind of happened, they just kind of worked out a deal where kind of -- kind of formalizing the informal relationship that already existed.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: You know, because the church had no status until then whatsoever. There was just kind of -- it was like an understood, you know, there were certain rules that were understood by both sides and accepted, but it wasn't -- it was never written down. And Salinas wrote it down and, you know, the pope signed it. And so that, that was a con -- it was kind of like Napoleon's Concordat I what it was like, you know, a couple of hundred years later, you know.

Q: What about -- all these terms get vague, but the indigenous population. I mean sort of the Indians? Was there much there? Were they a separate group or treated differently or what?

FROST: There weren't many. I mean most of them had been exterminated or had gone somewhere else. And they were -- but the sort of indigenous tribe to Sonora was called the Yaquis, Y-A-Q-U-I, it looks like Yankee without the, without the end, you know, Yaqui Indians. And they -- it's kind of interesting because all the -- the, the, the Sonora, you know, the regular, you know, Mestizo Mexican Sonorans that are -- there's some -- there's a famous oath called the Yaqui Pledge or something. And I, I, I, I guess it must have been part of the tribe's history and it was sort of like this kind of oath of honor, macho, you know, I don't know how to describe it, kind of, kind of an ethical code or something, you know. And, and it was all translated into Spanish and stuff. But I mean every time you go into government office, you know, the guy would have the Yaqui Code or the Yaqui Oath on its wall, code by which allegedly they were all supposed to live, which of course nobody did. So there was kind of a -- it was kind of a, you know, it was kind of bogus, you know, basically, you know. But somehow that, that -- the - -that was -- I guess that was the lip service they gave to their, to their -- so -- their ancestors that weren't really their ancestors, you know what I mean? But it wasn't -- more -- you

get to the west there where those Indians that run barefoot for hundreds of miles and then there's the Copper Canyon and, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But that's more Chihuahua, you know, there wasn't much to be seen down there.

Q: What about the police and corruption?

FROST: Yeah, it was -- I wouldn't say it was as bad as Tijuana. Of course you had fewer tourists to be fleeced, you know. So maybe it just wasn't as physical. Like I say, there was a commander -- the Federal Highway Patrol across the street from me with the house that he couldn't possibly afford on his meager salary, and you know, it was -- you know, there were some, there were some allegations that the Governor of State and particularly his brother were in league with the narcos and had seen with unsavory people at the airport and, you know, so on and so forth. I mean it was clearly there, but not really like ultra-visible, I guess. But you know, not really talked about a whole lot. But, but clearly -- clearly it was there. One of the -- one of the things that was a problem for us is -- and you know, I can't remember much in the way of, of corruption coming out in regards to our American citizen customers, you know, in, in, in -- as opposed to Tijuana where it came up a lot more frequently. But one of the things that was, that was a problem was that cars would be stolen from Arizona and taken into Mexico and chopped up or, you know, the VIN (vehicle identification number) numbers filed off or, you know, recycled in some way. Many of them made their way to the interior, you know, say Mexico City and the surrounding area where there was a huge market for cars. Because Mexico had taxed them so heavily a lot of people really couldn't afford cars because, you know, the taxes and the duties and all this crap that they had, you know. Because they were trying to squee -- you know, it was an artificial thing, you know. There was a Ford factory, state of the art Ford plant that made Ford Escorts in, in, in Hermosillo. But not one of those cars were sold in Mexico, they all were exported to the U.S. Not one of them was sold in Mexico. All the production Ford exported to the U.S.

Q: How did you find these -- what are they called -- these areas along the border or factories and all that?

FROST: Maquiladoras.

Q: Maquiladoras. Did this seem to be a good system?

FROST: I'll have a story about that in a little -- that's a very good question, let me just finish off about the cars. What I was going to say was that this affected -- the car -- the stolen car situation affected us because, because there were -- they had these kind of oily Americans or maybe Mexican Americans or border denizens and these car recovery agents who were, who were representing the American insurance companies that would come down and try to get these cars back, you know. And we had a lot of business with

them at the consulate, you know. And we tried to -- I mean we tried to help them obviously because we wanted to stop this, you know, and, and it never stopped. But you know, fight against it at the very least. And the worst thing that ever happened is that, is that they were building a new border post up in Nogales, a new facility for customs and immigration right on, you know, there for people to cross. And some guy called me from up there I think and a Mex -- an American was working on this project. And he said -- he had an office up there, he was like a construction supervisor or something. Said, you know, "I saw the fun -- I saw the most amazing thing, you know, today. I looked out my window and I saw my car that had been stolen in Tucson, you know, six weeks ago, driven up and a uniform Mexican customs officer got out of it and went inside. And that's -- I know that's my car, you know, and I want it back." So I mean this was really flagrant. I thought it was just atrocious, you know.

So I went down -- I went down to -- up, up -- down the hall to see my customs guy, really nice guy, Peruvian American guy. And I said, "Gus," and I told him about this. And I said, "Here's -- here's what I," --

And he said, "He -- this guy's your contact. I mean the head of customs up there." He said, "Yeah, you know, we all knew he was -- we all suspected that he was dirty," because apparently I -- when you went up there all the cars had Arizona license plates on them that were in the -- in their parking area for American customs. You know, where did those come from and whose cars were there?

And so I said, "I want you to do something for me. I want you to call your guy up there and tell him, tell him about this and say that I'm setting up," -- I didn't want to go up there myself and even -- did I send a Vice Consul? I think I may have. A Vice Consul and a Mexican employee, I guess. I said, "I'm sending -- tell him that we're sending a couple people up there, you know, to get this car back for this guy because it's stolen, you know. And I don't want -- I don't, I don't want to mess with a formal recovery process or any of this crap because, you know, you know, this is just terrible. And just tell him that when those people get up there the only simple answer that, that, that -- the only acceptable thing for him to do is to hand them the keys to that car so they can take it back to its owner, you know." And, and if, if so, well that's just -- it's at its close. But we're going to raise holy hell if, if you don't do that *(laughs)*, you know. And so I don't think he really -- it was not a very comfortable phone call for him, but you know, what could he do? I mean he agreed with me, you know.

I sent the people up there and they got the runaround for two or three or four hours or stuff like that, and they called me, you know. I said, "You stay there until you get that car back, you know, get a hotel room, you have to, you know, you know. I'll call Mexico City and we'll force their hand, you know, if it comes to that." After a while they, they caved in and they gave them the cars and they brought the car back to, you know, drove it over to where the guy was and gave him the keys back and his car. So you know, that was the kind of stuff that --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- that happened. Not very often, but it happened. Oh, you were asking about the maquiladoras, right? Well, that was -- that was -- we, you know, we, we -- they became a focus of the whole NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) thing, you know, when this, when NAFTA -- the run-up to NAFTA and the opposition was organized and it was a political issue and it was a Republican --

Q: Yeah, Ross Perot was running.

FROST: Ross Perot, the giant sucking sound and all of that, yeah.

Q: Yeah, sucking sound, all of these jobs going to Mexico.

FROST: Yeah, and, and so it was kind of interesting. We had, we had a, we had a congressional del -- a CODEL (congressional delegation) at that time that were -- a lot of people were going to the border and touring these plants to, you know, as part of their fact finding about NAFTA. And of course, which was a very contentious, conflicting issue. So we had one of those come to our district and they, they went up -- it was basically in the Nogales area that they were these -- and I had helped them set up -- I helped set up some, some visits for them to two or three or four of these places. And so I went up there with them. I guess think maybe they flew to -- they flew to Hermosillo and I picked them up and drove them up there, something. So I was driving -- my driver and I were driving them around Sonora, you know, which was kind of interesting. Some of them were -- one of them was Richard Durbin who later was this, you know, Senator, Democratic, leading Democrat Senator for a long --

Q: Oh yeah.

FROST: He was, he was I think only a Congressman at the time and there was George Miller, who was Head of the House Interior Committee, a guy from New Mexico, and a local guy from Arizona. I think there were about those four. And, and I was driving them around. And, and so we went to visit one -- it was kind of embarrassing because -- as it turned out because they had -- there was -- there was -- they made garage door openers, you know. This one plant up there did. And it -- so it happened their main competition was a, a garage door opening plant in, in Durbin's district to Chicago. And so they were alleging that, you know, they were being undercut by this cheap Mexican competition by some American company that was making garage door openers in Mexico instead of in the States, and cheap labor and the whole business. And so I didn't, I didn't know this but I -- it -- when, when we got there it turned out that there was a -- some local journalist from Illinois showed up, you know. And, and they might have even been like one of the Chicago papers, I don't know, but you know, and he kind of, he kind of got in on the Congressmen's coat tails, and then wrote a savaging article about the plant appeared in Illinois, you know. And oh, the -- I mean the, the, the manager of the plant was pissed at me because I, I didn't know anything -- it -- I was sandbagged, he was sandbagged. We were all sandbagged. And he would never talk to me again and I, I guess I didn't blame him, you know, I had to apologize and, you know, gee, I didn't know this was happening,

I feel -- I feel used and abused just as much as you do. But of course, you know, wasn't my plant, you know, so. So that was kind of -- it was kind of, you know, it was kind of embarrassing either way. But that was the kind of stuff that was going on, you know, at the time, I'm sure sort of border-wide.

And Negroponte, you know, that was his, that was his crowning accomplishment, you know. He stayed beyond his normal term of office because, you know, he was managing that whole thing from the American side. And I think did an excellent job at it. And you know, he wasn't going to leave until it was decided, and it was decided in favor of it. And of course there was that famous debate on TV between Ross Perot and Al Gore. And later, it was kind of funny, I was at this Arizona-Sonora meeting, and of course all the people on both sides, Arizona and Sonora that were active in this, this relationship were, you know, gung-ho in favor of NAFTA because it helped them and their states, you know. And, and, and there was a guy up there, he was in -- local -- kind of a local environmentalist. And he was introduced at this thing. I didn't know this guy, but I -- he, he was introduced to -- as the man who -- the -- was instrumental in, in helping Al Gore win that debate. And apparently, they had a -- he was somehow -- he, he was sent to -- when they were -- when they were kind of like doing the murder board thing for, for Al Gore and how he's going to respond to Perot and how he's going to handle that debate -- debate. This guy's advice apparently to Al -- and this guy said -- when he gave his eulogy to -- this guy up there now, how important he was in the process and said, you know, "And he just kept telling Al Gore look, Ross Perot will self-destruct. You don't have to destroy him. Just let him talk and he'll destroy himself. And don't feel like you have, you know, just let him go, you know."

And of course that's the way it really was because I, I remember just watching it, you know, on TV. And it's sort of like, here's Ross Perot, "Now, just let me finish! Let me finish!" And it's like Gore was not saying anything. I mean *(laughs),* you know? I mean he was prepared to -- he was prepared for an argument and Gore was just kind of boring and measured like he always was. And Ross Perot ended up looking like an idiot. And after -- you know, that was kind of the -- one of the crucial things that led to the, led to NAFTA passing, so. So that was -- that was, that was a very interesting time, you know. It was -- we were on the -- we were on, sort of on the margins of it all up there.

Q: How did your wife find --

FROST: Well, you know, I mentioned the provincialness of it all, and she was, she was -- it was -- she was not happy there because it's a very boring place, not a, not a whole lot for her to do. And she did something that I thought was a lasting contribution she founded this -- well, she couldn't really call it American Women's -- because there weren't enough American women there, but there were -- it was kind of an English -- there was some, you know. So basically the American women, such as they were in Hermosillo and the kind of bilingual upper crust Mexican people, who maybe had graduated from school where my kids went and stuff like that, you know. So she founded this kind of English-speaking women's club, and there'd never been anything like that there. So it was just kind of a focus for these --

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: -- lonely, you know, ladies with nothing to do in this boring, provincial town, you know to socialize and to do charity work and so forth. So she founded that. But she was not, she was not happy there. Nor was the wife of my Deputy. And my Deputy, even though he, you know, he liked his job and I liked my job and we were happy there, but he curtailed after -- he curtailed after a year. He got a -- there was a vacancy in Lusaka, Zambia for a Consular Officer and he was -- he, you know, volunteer cable and he was out, you know. Replaced by a guy who had been a hostage in Iran that I hadn't known before and who had much less Consular experience. I eventually decided I was going to curtail after two years because my kids were not doing -- they, they, they pretty well adjusted to the school by then and their Spanish was thriving and they were, they were -- but by the end of the, our two years there they were making the honor roll in the Spanish subjects too, not just the English ones. So you know, but it was kind of like, you know, I think if we were -- we could do better somewhere else as far as schools are concerned, you know. And the playground was, you know, cement with no grass at the school, you know, and it was 100° most of the year and, and you know, so, so I asked for curtailment and it was granted. So -- no, it was not, it was not a good place. And people didn't understand it. Because I mean you had the largest Carl's Jr. fast food restaurant in the world, an American chain. You had a Jack in the Box, you had Blockbuster Video, and Domino's Pizza. You know, what more could you want, you know? And, and, and it was -- you know, it was, it was a pleasant place except for the heat, you know? But people didn't understand kind of the loneliness of it, the fact that, you know, you're a border town yet not a border town. If you want to go to Tucson it's 250 miles. And you know, so it's hard to explain to people unless you've been there what was wrong with it as a post, you know. But everybody that was there felt I think the same way *(laughs)*. So, so that was -- that was a, that was what it was like.

Q: So you left when?

FROST: I left in June of '94. And --

Q: And where did you go?

FROST: I was having trouble getting a fit for a job. By then I had been promoted while I was still in my previous post, not the War College, but Conakry. I was promoted to FS-1 in '89 after I'd been in for a year. So this was '94. So I was looking to, to make the Senior Foreign Service I'd already punched my DCM ticket and this was my Principal Officer ticket. So I thought, "Well, you know, probably the best thing to do now is to get an FS-1 consular job, some visa mill somewhere." But I was having trouble finding a place that fit where they wanted me, I wanted them, and so on and so forth. So I ended up -- my CDO, I guess it was, saved me form walking the halls by getting me a detail back at Maxwell AFB,/ Air University to be adjunct instructor\advisor at the Air Command and Staff College one level down, Montgomery, Alabama where I'd been two years before. So it's kind of like, you know, we were going back to sort of my hometown that

we'd never really had in the States, and my kids had never really had a hometown either, you know. So we got to return to the AME church, same nice little private school for the girl, etc., so we knew the territory, it was a one-year deal. So we were pretty happy with that. And then, then I had a year to find a job, you know.

Q: What did you do at Maxwell --

FROST: Oh, let me go back to my last -- I have a couple things in Mexico --

Q: Sure.

FROST: -- A lot of interesting things were happening as I departed. One of them was -- there was a border, a border conference in, in Laredo -- oh, it was actually in Nuevo -- I guess it was on the Mexican side. Bilateral border, there's a Bilateral Commission for Border Issues I think it was, which including mainly immigration, but also other stuff. And so somehow that year -- this was kind of the Salinas administration's swan song because they were, there were elections scheduled for December, I think it was. And this was like spring of '94. Mary Ryan, Head of Consular Affairs for State, and Doris Meissner who was the Commissioner of the INS at the time, were our delegation leaders. But this year they invited -- because this was NAFTA, you know, NAFTA had just come in not too long before. And of course NAFTA the Mexican peso plummeted when NAFTA came in, like pretty much the day after. And they had this Zapatista insurgency way down in Oaxaca and so forth. I think it was a high water market of Mexico in a way, when we went to this thing. And they invited all the border consuls from all the border posts, both sides, Mexican and American, which I thought was really neat, you know. And we were all there, kind of the spear-carriers for this delegation, you know, just to watch it and, and to be part of this, you know, this huge meeting. And here were all these Mexicans in -- dressed in Brooks Brothers suits-- the Mexican delegation had their act together, whether it was local, state, or federal, they're all the same party, it's all a model, kind of like the USSR or something, you know. And we're all over the map, you know. Because we had these little local commissions and that were all over the map and the -- when the Border Patrol commander brings in a rock at the meeting, at the local meeting and says, you know, this rock is -- this is, this is a bolder virtually, you know, big rock. It was thrown at one of my bicycle patrolmen, you know in Nogales, you know, and this is -- I mean they talk about throwing rocks, it's not a kid picking up gravel and throwing it. It's this, you know. And so, you know, there's all this tension and stuff like that. And you know, the Sheriff of Cochise is not going to -- he doesn't care what I think. You know, he's the Sheriff of Cochise and he's got his own constituencies, his own agenda. But the Mexicans are -- they're singing from the same sheet of music, you know, on these things. So it's kind of fascinating to watch. But all the Mexicans had, had all these -- they had cell phones, they had nicer suits than we wore. We didn't have cell phones, you know. And, and they were talking about -- they had just joined the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), you know, and that was a big feather in their cap. They were a developed country now. And they had all these plants for their southern border with Guatemala, you know, which sounded very much like our southern border with them. They're going to have remote sensors and they're going to have patrols. And

thought gee, you know, because the, because the Guatemalans and the Hondurans are like their Mexicans, you know *(laughs)*, where the Mexicans are our Mexicans.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so it was just kind of -- I mean this was, this was -- they saw this bright future in which, you know, was -- has since been pretty well derailed I think you would probably say, but like I say, high water mark comes to mind in my, in my opinion. But the other thing I wanted to tell you about that's fascinating about this conference is while I was there -- remember I talked about how I would always blab on Channel 12 whenever they stuck a mike in front of me and didn't think anyone was watching except in Sonora? Well, I, I -- the number -- there was a number two guy for the, the Director General of SRE, the evil Foreign Ministry, you know, whose name was Andrés Rozental, you know, and, and anybody that's named Andrés Rozental had to prove every day that he was "really Mexican", you know, and be more nationalist than anyone, which he delighted in doing, you know. And of course not that he was the only one that did that. But he was a nice guy and a smart guy, representing SRE. And I met him over drinks or something and I was chatting with him and told him I was the Consul in Sonora. And he said, "Oh, Señor Frost."

I said, "That's right."

He said, "Oh, I've seen you on TV."

And I thought "Oh, really? That must be Canal Doce." And so I checked around and I found out that all the time I was just saying whatever came into my head when asked by Canal Doce, that it was seen on cable in ten other states in the republic, including Mexico City.

Q: Oh God.

FROST: And so people were actually watching me -- I was some kind of kind of de facto American government spokesman in El Norte. I suppose a lot of times they would ask the embassy and they would get no comment.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And they would ask Frost and he'd say something, you know, off the top of his head. But I thought, "Well, I must have -- I must have done been pretty well because nobody ever called me and chastised me for talking or saying the wrong thing."

Q: No.

FROST: I didn't have any guidance as to what to say or what not to say, so I just said it. But it was kind of funny, you know. That was kind of my swan song in Hermosillo.

And the other interesting thing that happened was a guy named Luis Donaldo Colosio, who was running for President from the PRI, and he was the frontrunner to get the nomination to be the next President, sort of hereditary president as it were after Salinas. And his father was the Cattle Minister in Sonora, cattle being a very big industry there, one of many. And the father had been an inspector in a USDA plant there years ago, and that's why he was called "Donaldo," because there aren't Mexicans called Donaldo. And so, so anyway, Colosio, he's kind of like a Mexican Kennedy. He was handsome, he was, he was well-spoken, he was charismatic, which is why I kind of what I thought of him as you know a Mexican JFK, 30 years later. And I had met him in some bilateral meeting or something and had lunch with him. Nice guy. And well, he was, he was campaigning in Mexico -- in Tijuana and he was shot. Some guy came up to him and held a pistol to his head in public when he was in a crowd or something and shot him in the head and killed him. It was a major tragedy in Sonora, he was their hope. Sonora was going to rise to the forefront.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: It's going to be their president and he'll steer lots of money there and, you know, development.

Q: I remember that.

FROST: And he had been a minister -- you have to resign when you run for president, you know, within a certain time of the election or whatever. But he had been in charge of "Solidariad," it was kind of a micro project oriented, "self-help-ish" kind of development agency fund to little wells and so forth in the hinterlands. It was very popular, it was a way to spread the money around and, you know, win votes and so forth. And Colosio had been handed that as his last job before he resigned in government. But it was -- oh, it was just, it was a tragedy. It was just, you know, and people were so sad, you know, and the whole state was just like depressed for like, you know, until I left. And I left only three months after that, I guess. They had a big official funeral in Mexico City -- though he wasn't a government official by then. He was only a candidate for president, you know. And of course his replacement won, you know, that was the last PRI president for awhile.

Q: Well --

FROST: But and, and I -- and they had a big funeral for him in Mexico City and a lot of people attended -- but then they brought his body back to Sonora. He lived in a town called Magdalena. It was halfway between Hermosillo and the border. A nice little town, cattle everywhere. So his funeral was held up there in his home town. And I called the Embassy, I said, "Well, I was just wondering -- I mean, are they sending anybody to his funeral up here?"

And they said, "No, we'd like, we'd like you to represent. It's not appropriate for us to send anybody up there. He's had his Mexico City political funeral, that's over with. But

this is his home funeral, so since you're the Consul in Hermosillo you're going to represent -- you'll be the representative if you want to go."
,
So I said, "Yes, I'd like to go." So I went up with my bodyguard and my driver and my buddy, Francisco Cordova, who was the Governor of Arizona's representative in Hermosillo. We went together since we were buddies, in my car. And just kind of walked around the streets and met Colosio's relatives from Los Angeles and blended in with the locals. It was a very local event, you know, and I felt kind of like an honorary Sonora. So it was something I will always remember -- a very unforgettable experience for me to be up there when --

Q: Oh yeah.

FROST: Poor guy had had, had a beautiful young wife who died of cancer about a year later leaving their two kids orphans.

Q: What was the cause of the assassination?

FROST: It was never -- it was one of those mysteries that was never solved, you know, and, you know, probably the -- what all usually happens is the guy's, you know, convicted and put away in some jail somewhere and then three or four years later when nobody's looking he gets a knife in the back and can never tell the story *(laughs),* you know, it's -- I don't know what the cause was, but --

Q: Any speculation? Was this PRI not wanting an overly popular guy or was this --

FROST: Yeah, it could, it could have been the opposition, you know, maximizing their chances in the election, you know, by the -- oddly enough, the PAN candidate from the last time was, was, was -- had, had, had died in a very mysterious car accident in the state of Sinaloa, where he was from. He couldn't -- he wasn't going to run again, mind you. But -- well, he could have, I don't know. I -- he was -- I'm not sure how popular he was. But anyway, that was kind of mysterious, that he died in this mysterious car accident and why was that, you know? And so but I don't, I, I don't really -- I didn't know much about it, you know, at the time. Except I mean it was flagrant. You know, the guy was -- you could see the -- on footage on TV they showed the gun going up and shooting him right there, you know, point blank range. And the, the replacement was a guy -- the problem was that a lot of the other good candidates, the best people to replace him, most of them, were ineligible because they were still in ministerial posts and constitutionally barred from running at that point, you know? And really there was only one guy named Ernesto Zedillo who was from Mexicali on the borders to the capital of Baja California, which might have been kind of awkward because he was Baja Californian, and that was where, where Colosio was killed. But I don't think he wanted it. He was, he was, he was kind of a nerdy technocrat, you know, without -- with zero charisma, was smart, capable but not a politician, you know? He was Minister of Education, I think, and -- but he, he happened to resign, I guess, just in time. So he was the candidate and he won, but you know, he wasn't a very strong president. And of course the PRI lost the office, you know, the next

election. So you know, I mean I don't know, you have to suspect the opposition, but who really knows what was what was going on there. And there was a poignant story (probably made up) of Zedillo, the reluctant replacement, walking the halls of the Presidential Palace, muttering to himself, saying "Damn you -- damn you, Colosio -- Damn you, Donaldo. Why did you abandon me -- why have you forsaken me?" You know, he didn't want to be president and all of a sudden he was thrust into it. He didn't have a choice. But he did his duty. And that was that.

Q: Well, then you went back to Maxwell Field.

FROST: Uh-huh.

Q: You were there from when-to-when?

FROST: I was there from July of '94 to July or August of '95-- one year.

Q: What were you doing?

FROST: I was, like I say, they never had a -- this is the -- this is the Air Command and Staff College, which was the school for majors in the Air Force, one level below the War College, which I had attended as a student, which is a school for Lt Colonels. And versus 250 students at the War College, the Command and Staff College had 600 students, who were Majors. And it was the first school where the students were not separated out by career tracks, they were training put them in the running to possible be generals, so-called "purple suit," officers, "joint" inter-service kind of people. Previously they had been fighter pilots, personnel guys, bomber pilots, transport pilots or whatever their career field was. And they were finally, you know, trying to broaden them beyond their specialty, make them generalists. They had never had State Department people at the Command and Staff College, whereas that had always had the usual State Department advisor at the Air War College. Colonel Warden was the Commandant at the time, and he wanted a State Department guy there, so they sent him two of us. There was some confusion and two of us were offered the slot, and when that came to light the Commandant, Colonel John Warden, who was trying to grow the school, said no problem, I'll take both of them. I think Jacques Klein was involved in that--I don't know whether you know him or not.

Q: I know --

FROST: Jacques Klein was, you know, he was, he was an FSO who was also a Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserve, and he was on the Board of Visitors to the Air War College and I had met him I think --

Q: Very much involved in --

FROST: Yes, yeah. Yeah, exactly, you know who he is, yeah. And he was the one -- he -- he was the CDO at the time, you know, for FS-1's, I think, and he was the one who that

got me this job, you know, which was very nice, you know. And it was Johnny Young who had been Ambassador to Sierra Leone when I was in Conakry, who helped me out--a prince of a man. He put me on to Jacques Klein who got me this job. But, but low and behold, they -- I guess somebody had promised it to another guy another FS-1 who was a Political Officers in Lisbon. So when they found that out I guess they thought, well here are both surplus guys that don't have anything else to do for the next year, so let's just, let's just send both of them. So there were two of us there that year and nobody had much of an idea what to do with us, you know. And the first problem, of course, as far as us being actual instructors is that we were civilians, we weren't military, we weren't Air Force. And the other problem was we were FS-1's, which is the equivalent to a full Colonel—the Commandant's rank.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Besides Colonel Warden, there were a couple other full Colonels his, but generally speaking the department heads, the military department heads in the, in the Command and Staff College were Lieutenant-Colonels, FS-2 equivalents. The line instructors who presided over the seminar groups were Majors, usually recycled students from the previous year's class who wanted stay there another year so were put on the faculty. We were too senior for any kind of position for responsibility that they would give us and, and, and because we were civilians there wasn't really much we could aspire to -- so we were kind of adjunct instructors. We learned how to use the internet, which, which was new. Colonel Warden was a fascinating character. He had been was the conceptual architect of the First Gulf War (Desert Storm) air campaign. At the time of the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait happened, he was the head of an air campaign planning office in the basement of the Pentagon called "Checkmate." Their business was to plan do campaign planning for air power, for air wars. And there weren't any air wars scheduled, you know, until this happened. All of a sudden there was one that was going to be happening very soon. And it was clear that air power was going to be key. So Checkmate didn't even wait to be asked before setting to work on a notional plan for the coming air campaign. By the time they *were* asked, they already had a first draft ready to present to Central Command.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So Checkmate went to see General Schwarzkopf and briefed him on their ideas. Warden was head of Checkmate because he had this theory of air power, which he published back when he was a student at the War College, I believe. His book was called The Air Campaign, and it outlined his concept of how air power should be employed. He had something called "the five rings theory." And the five rings theory was that here's the enemy, it's called "the enemy as a system," and so you make a big circle, and that's the big enemy. And their system consists of five concentric rings, one inside the other, they get smaller and smaller. And the outer ring is -- the outer ring is the people, the population, the civilians. The next ring in is the infrastructure, then the fielded forces (military muscle), then command and control. The innermost ring is the leadership. The idea is that you skip over as many of the outer rings as you can, because if you just attack

and successfully destroy the inner rings first you don't have to worry about the outer rings, because the enemy "system" will collapse.

Q: Mm.

FROST: And so the idea, idea about -- behind the Air Campaign is first of all, you knock out the air defenses, which they did with the F-117 stealth bombers and Apache helicopters. And then you destroy the enemy communications. By the time you get to the fielded forces they're so weakened , because you bombed the field of forces like their tank brigades and stuff, you know, before you go, that -- and they were attacking, you know, they had a huge number of stories going and they were attacking everything at once, so you couldn't repair anything because, you know, you were attacked every day. Everything was attacked every day. Unlike World War II where the, the failed strategic bombing campaign was targeted one day, because that's all they had planes to do, and then they'd attack the next day, and all were going back. They'd be -- while they'd be attacking Target B they'd be repairing Target A. And so it was, it was what they call -- it was, it was attacks in parallel rather than in series. So this was the John Warden Theory of Air Power. Like I say, it wasn't completely all original, but you know, he was the theorist, he was the Billy Mitchell of our time--remember Mitchell, between the word wars?

Q: Oh yeah.

FROST: Got fired, you know, for proving that you could --

Q: Billy Mitchell was --

FROST: Yeah—fired! And nothing that bad happened to him, but Warden was kind of, you know, he had a certain arrogance about him, just as Mitchell did. He was one of those people who was his own worst enemy, that would make enemies that he didn't need to make. For example, first day of the year when, when, when I was there, we, we were, they -- there were limited seats at the opening ceremony, so we watched on a closed circuit TV on our office. And you know, they -- he introduced the commandant of Air University, the commander of Air University who was a Lieutenant-General, Boyd, who was a -- had been a POW (Prisoner of War) in Vietnam, kind of a legendary guy, as "Lieutenant-Colonel Boyd." Sort of a Freudian slip, but you know, you don't, you don't, you don't call your boss Lieutenant-Colonel if he's Lieutenant-General. But that's the kind of stuff that Warden is sort of like, "Is there a -- does he have a self-destructive impulse?" You may have seen some FSOs like that, too. When Warden led Checkmate to brief air campaign to General Schwarzkopf he brought all of his staff with him, they were mainly Lieutenant-Colonels. And so at the end of the meeting, General Schwarzkopf liked the campaign plan and basically proved the concept. But he looked around the room and pointed to all of Warden's subordinates and, "You, you, you, and you, I'd like you to be my air staff. You go home and pack up and come back here in a week, you know. You're my air staff." But he did not point to their leader, Colonel Warden.

So Colonel Warden went back to Checkmate in the basement of the Pentagon, and apparently when his loyal subordinates tried to communicate with him during the war they had to -- they had to kind of do it on the sly, like back channel, you know. And they would – apparently when they would receive a cable from Warden it would say "Checkmate" at the end, and they would cut off "Checkmate" so that Schwarzkopf and company wouldn't be able to see it, because he was like -- he was like a pariah. And I don't know what he did wrong. To this day I don't know why he sat out the war of his lifetime in the basement of the Pentagon, you know. And then afterwards he was made commandant of, of Air Command and Staff College. And that was his last job before retirement. It's kind of an interesting story -- that's why I compare him to Billy Mitchell, because he an air power theorist that sort of ended up wrong somehow, you know. They said -- he was, he was a fighter pilot with "bad hands" who had spent too much time at the Pentagon. And he came off as arrogant, a common curse of fighter pilots. But at the Commandant of the Command and Staff College, he worked hard to upgrade the school in innovative ways. He had some sugar daddy in the Pentagon or Congress somehow that could give him money for his school. And the year we were there every one of the 600 students was issued a government laptop that they were allowed keep and take with them to their next job. And, this was in '94, '95--very early on for this stuff.

Q: Very early on.

FROST: The school was a paperless environment, the schedule was not printed, it was found on your computer.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: When you did your exams you did them on your computer and emailed them to your professor. Warden was in the forefront of a lot of stuff, so it was kind of a cool place to be, but we didn't have much of a role in it except to learn the internet, which we did. My State colleague and became good friends. They put us in an office with a Naval advisor whose name was Dave "Arlo" Guthrie. And so we put a fake sign on our which said "Office of Gunboat Diplomacy," given that its occupants were two diplomats and a Naval Officer. We even answered our phones, "Office of Gunboat Diplomacy, Lt. Commander Guthrie here" or whatever. And one time someone from the State Department actually called and they were flummoxed by that, of course.

Q: Ah.

FROST: *(laughs)* But that was -- we had a good time. We had a good time while we were there and learned a lot about a lot, but --

Q: What, what were you teaching there?

FROST: We didn't really teach, we did not have a -- we, we would just make cameo appearances and we would critique lesson plans and, you know, we were asked for input like, you know, we're doing a nation building exercise, you know, can you look at it, see

if it makes any sense. That -- we were just adjuncts, you know. There was not a whole lot -- we didn't plug in easily, you know. And, and that was fine because we were getting paid at least. But one time I remember the, the culmination of our, of our time there, which is a very telling incident I think is we got called by -- and that, that was an interesting time too because of what was going on then, there was the Haiti thing, there was Rwanda, you know, there was Bosnia.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: Clearly, you know, we were moving into -- from the new world order that was so much talked about when I was there in '91, '92, to the new world *disorder*, which was started to really take hold in '94, '95, you know, moving towards the non-state actors and, you know, eventually what happened with 9/11 and stuff, you know. So it was, it was an interesting time in history in that sense. Clinton was -- Clinton had taken office and they were really starting to think about, you know, what this meant for, for the Air Force and the Armed Forces. And so one day we got a call from one of our colleagues. one of the line instructors who had a seminar. And she said, "Don't have time to explain now, but I want both you guys please to come to my seminar at 1:00 today. I can't explain it, but you'll know why when you get there."

So we were sort of saying, "Well, OK, you know, this is going to be interesting, we're going to actually maybe teach something or," you know, I don't know what -- we had no idea, what was what. And so we get there and they're doing this kind of nation building exercise. It's some kind of a humanitarian operation, you know, modeled on Haiti or Bosnia or something, you know. And the problem she wanted us to address was that all the, all the type A fighter pilots in the class who were warriors who had always conceived of their job as being, as they say, kill people and break things. So all of a sudden they had to do civil affairs, humanitarian assistance, you know, be the de facto government of this lawless Godforsaken awful place in the Middle East or wherever the heck it was.

And they were resisting it. They, they didn't want any part of this. They said, "Well, let's just -- this is not my oath, this is not what I signed up to do in the Air Force. This is, you know, not -- they shouldn't -- you know, this is something for civilians to do, like the State Department."

So here were the State Department guys being brought in to kind of deal with that and help our colleague out. And what we said is just kind of we've been doing a lot of thinking about, because it had been in everybody's minds. And we sort of said, "Listen, first of all. To tell you the truth, the sad truth about the State Department is that we're not really trained or equipped to do any of this stuff. This is not what we were trained for either for that matter, you know. And yeah, it's more civilian than it is military in the traditional sense, but it's almost as foreign to us as it is to you, you know. We don't have this capability. You do. Because you're the Pentagon, you're the Air Force, you're the Armed Forces. You can do all this stuff, you know? You got to learn how to do it because you're going to be the ones who are going to be asked to do it in the future, you know. And when you go to the Pentagon in your purple suit next assignment and you're not

flying a plane anymore or even commanding a squadron, you know, you've got -- this is going to be -- this is going to be what you're going to be doing next tour when you leave, you know, in six months. So you know, with all due respect, get used to it *(laughs)*. This is the Air Force -- the Armed Forces of the future, you know." And I don't know how many people we persuaded, but you know --

Q: Well, it's true --

FROST: And look what happened, you know.

Q: Yeah, I mean, you know, load a team on a C130 and they fly into an airfield in Central Africa --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- all of a sudden they got a humanitarian disaster on their hands --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- and they're supposed to do something about it.

FROST: My advice to my classmates at the War College when we were already talking about this kind of operations, you know, being the wave of the future, is that first of all, and having, having served, you know, a couple of tours in Africa, let me tell you about Africa. The first, the rule number one through ten in Africa is host nation support, forget about it, you know. You got to take everything with you. Because you know, you're not going to get -- you're not going to get -- you're not going to get fuel for your planes, you're not going to get fuel for your generators, you're not going to get food. You're going to get nothing, you know, from the host government, because they don't have anything *(laughs)*. So, so that's the first lesson, you know, of humanitarian intervention -- intervention in Africa, bring everything with you.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, and the air -- the military can do that, you know, but I don't think either -- this is just a personal opinion here, but I mean I don't think either the State Department or the military is very good at this stuff, you know, anyway. And I personally think we should do as little of it as we can from now on.

Q: Well, you were beginning to start just at the time when all of a sudden we were learning that there's such a thing as the non-government organizations.

FROST: Yep.

Q: Which sometimes, not always, but can help.

FROST: Yep.

Q: I mean it's not perfect, but the point is, I mean, when you start putting all the elements together, the State Department, the military, and the NGO's --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- there's an answer.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: But it requires a hell of a lot of thinking and coordination and flexibility.

FROST: And, and my colleague, my colleague, the, the Political Officer that was with me at that time, I remember he kept saying to me, you know, he said, "It's always kind of like let the UN do it." Well, of course, think about it. At that point in history, the Soviet Union was gone, China had not risen, France and Britain were still -- were still, you know, auxiliary, you know, mid level powers, you know. The UN was us. *We* ran the UN, we dominated the UN.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So don't say -- don't talk about the UN like it's a foreign body, you know. I mean the UN -- we do stuff through the UN. We bend it to our will if need be, you know. And, and I mean we were the center of gravity of course as, as the Somalia thing proved. We were, we were the center of gravity in any of these operations, you know, knock the U.S. out of the thing and it all collapses, you know. And I think Madeline Albright, who wasn't one of my favorite Secretaries of State, called us the "indispensable nation." And she wasn't wrong.

Q: No, I mean, as I do these oral histories I come to the realization that so many places, if the United States doesn't take a stand, who else is going to do it?

FROST: Yeah.

Q: The answer is nobody.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: And things will just keep getting worse and worse and worse. Sometimes we make terrible mistakes.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: Sometimes we shouldn't. But we're still there. I mean it --

FROST: Yeah, yeah. Well, I think that -- I think that, you know, Libya -- Libya was kind of, was a neat thing, because we managed to kind of, you know, lead from behind.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: That was the wrong thing to say, but -- on the part of the President, whoever said it, but you know, the French and the -- the French mainly and, you know, mainly the French I guess, you know, they kind of, they kind of got out front.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And it worked. And we didn't have any people killed and no boots on the ground and, you know, no, you know, massive humanitarian operation or anything. And yet, we won. I mean we helped them, helped them win, I guess we should say.

Q: Well, I'm looking at the time and I think this is probably a good place to stop.

FROST: OK.

Q: And we'll pick this up when you left the Air War College. And where did you go?

FROST: I went to -- I was Consul General in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Q: OK. So we'll pick it up.

FROST: Perfect.

Q: Pick it up then. And this is when? You were there from when-to-when?

FROST: From '95 -- August of '95 to May of '98.

Q: OK.

FROST: Great, we'll pick it up then.

Q: OK. Today is the 20th of April, Hitler's birthday, 2012.

FROST: That's right.

Q: With Gregg Frost. Gregg, we left you, you're leaving the War -- the Air Force War College and you're off to -- where are you off to?

FROST: Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Consul General.

Q: OK. What year is that?

FROST: 1995.

Q: OK. What's the situation in Honduras?

FROST: Well, let's see. Honduras is, everybody sort of knows is kind of the original "Banana Republic."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And basically, I guess, it's pretty much, you know, stable and so forth. It's -- it is one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere. Kind of normalizing itself from the, the '80s where, during the Central American civil wars or whatnot involving the contras in Nicaragua, and so forth, it was kind of our base for the Contra War, which we supported during the Reagan administration. And thus, it assumed an importance sort of out of proportion to its natural order at that point. But that was all gone by then and so, you know, it's kind of funny because I think Latin America, in countries like Honduras, it was sort of like well, now that this Cold War is over the United States is going to focus on us for our intrinsic value, and unfortunately that value is not high.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Unfortunately for them, you know. And it wasn't necessarily a good thing that they couldn't play us off against the Soviets and so forth any more, that was all over with. And so it was kind of, you know, it was -- we were, you know, five years I suppose you'd say into the beginning of, you know, the post-Soviet era. And well, so it wasn't really much excitement going on down there at that point.

Q: Well, your job was Consul General.

FROST: Right.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FROST: The ambassador was Bill, William Price. He was -- I guess I was there for his last year as Ambassador and then two years of Jim Creagan.

Q: Uh-huh.

FROST: Creagan came in after him.

Q: I've interviewed Price, and Jim Creagan was sort of my deputy when I was Consul General in Naples.

FROST: Ah. Yes, he's an old Italy hand, wasn't he?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: He was later I think DCM in the Vatican and then he was in -- was he in Rome as well I think maybe?

Q: I think something like that.

FROST: And he was -- I think when he retired he was President of John Cabot University in Rome for a while.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: I don't think he's doing that anymore, but yeah.

Q: Well, was there anything going on in Honduras that sort of engaged our embassy?

FROST: Well, let's see. Of course there was always -- there was always bananas. That was, you know, always -- you had Dole and Chiquita there.

Q: OK. Let's talk a bit about the banana trade. As you took a look at it, how in the 1990's was the banana trade being run? I mean sort of these ruthless --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- banana companies milking the workers and all. But what was happening?

FROST: Well, yeah, that is interesting. Like I say, Chiquita and Dole were the big operations there on the north coast, the Caribbean north coast. And one -- I can't remember which was which, but one was a direct descendent of United Fruit, and the other was a direct descendent of Standard Fruit, which were the two companies that started it all, I guess. And so they owned vast amounts of land where the bananas were grown and, you know, they basically shipped them northwards to various southern ports. I guess the original banana port was New Orleans. Sam Zemurray the pioneer for United or Standard, again, I forget which. But he was the one to really establish bananas in Honduras. And he chose the port of New Orleans, which was sort of geographically the closest, I guess, the most convenient. And as a consequence, there's a large Honduran population in Louisiana. Houma, Louisiana is the sort of epicenter of the Honduran diaspora in the US, such as it is, the starting point for the immigration of Hondurans to the States. And so that, that started, you know, there's sort of the export of people as, as far as people going north to immigrate. And at that time, it was interesting, when I got there my predecessor decided he was going to retire, a fellow named Fernando Sanchez. And he decided he was going to retire in Honduras and work for Chiquita as sort of the government relations person, because he had lots of contacts there. He'd been a Consul General for like maybe three, if not -- perhaps even four years. And so he did that. And so there was -- there was this dispute going on at the time where there -- there were in 1995, when there was an area called Tacamiche. And this was, this was, this was area, I'm not sure how large, of acreage in Northern Honduras there during -- in the Manama

area, which Chiquita had owned for many years and -- but did not need. So basically, they, they, they pretty much allowed these squatters to live on this land because they weren't using it. I don't think they charged him any rent or anything, they just kind of tolerated because it was - they weren't using the land. Then around that time, for whatever reason, they needed that land back and it was their land. And so there were these squatters. And you know, the problem was how to, how to run them off without any violence ensuing and so on and so forth. And, and of course some -- there were apparently some professional squatters that really didn't -- had lived there in any amount of time at all, but they moved in and then participated in this thing. It was a little bit of a racket I think on that side, but there were probably legitimate -- on the other hand, there were people who legitimately felt that gee, well, I'd been allowed to live here all this time, you know, you know, and this is my home and I don't want to leave. So that was kind of a delicate situation. And my predecessor ended up after he left the Foreign Service and worked for Chiquita, he ended up brokering an agreement between Chiquita and the Honduran to pay the squatters off or somehow get them off this land. So that wasn't a really big deal, but it was, it was sort of the main issue at the time.

Q: Well, did you have the feeling that at this time that the banana companies were -- had both one, an undo influence, and two, were exploiting the workers or things -- things were changing, weren't they?

FROST: Yeah. Well, they did, they did, they did a lot of good for the country, I think. For example, one of them, the part of, part of Chiquita is still called the Tela Railroad Company, because they built a railroad up there to get the bananas to, to where they needed to be to ship them out. And so, you know, they, they had in -- they improved the infrastructure and provided for a lot of jobs. Not, not well paid ones, by any means of course, but they -- but things were changing because -- it was an aging industry, in that sense, but there were a number of -- in San Pedro Sula, which was the economic capital of the country -- inland from the north coast, but sort of closer to it than probably the capital -- became kind of a hub for these maquila plants, you know, like they have in Mexico, where they made you know, Hathaway shirts and other apparel, clothing companies and so forth, and some other factories they were setting up there.

Q: And --

FROST: Exporting to the U.S.

Q: And usually there are concessions made that they don't pay the export/import taxes as the same right as --

FROST: Right, right, exactly, yeah. So, but you know, it was just kind of -- I mean the bananas were, were part of life. I mean no, nobody remembered when they didn't have that, you know, and so it was just kind of part of the whole fabric of the country and accepted and just sort of, you know, they were there and not that they had a huge high profile or anything like that. But it was kind of funny because I think that the U.S. government, USIS, USIA conducted -- had a poll and the question was -- this came out

around the time I arrived, I think, and it was like, Q "Who is the most powerful man in Honduras? A: Number one, the American ambassador. Number two, the president of the Honduras" And you know, that was kind of the perception of the people.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, that -- and the banana companies historically worked hand in glove with the embassy and so forth, and they were American companies. And so that was, that was -- that was kind of the perception of the people. Not that the ambassador strutted around or anything like that, but he was generally seen as a very important man. But the thing was it was a country -- the way I described -- came to know it was it was a country of low -- what I would call low national self-esteem. I used to say if Honduras was a person they would kind of be, you know, kind of poor posture and looking down at their shoes and kind of lack of self-confidence and so forth, because they had this -- they had been, as you say, under the thumb of the Yankee imperialist for so long, and so they, they tended to -- they tended to be kind of -- another word I kind of coined for it was "negative nationalism." I mean they were, they were nationalistic, but in, in a sort of defensive way, if you know what I mean, in terms of that.

Q: Yeah. Did you get any reflections -- I don't know if it was going on then -- but sort of a long, subliminal war, the so called "Banana War" between sort of the Europeans, particularly France and Italy and the United States? Bananas I'm told are the most popular item in the grocery -- in the supermarkets. I mean a lot of bananas --

FROST: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: -- go in and out. And so the trade is lucrative and it's expensive to ship these. I mean these are bulk items. And the Europeans have their markets, and Martinique --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- and Somalia and other places. And did that reflect itself there or?

FROST: I can't really -- I remember reading about that, and it seemed to me like it was pretty much over before I got there. And I didn't really understand really well -- it didn't seem to be an issue. It was kind of resolved, I think.

Q: Just as -- just --

FROST: And of course Chiquita had hedged their bets by developing bananas in Ecuador --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and elsewhere to make sure they had alternative sources.

Q: Yeah. Well, what was sort of your job?

FROST: Well, it was basically -- I mean there were -- Honduras was kind of -- I would say kind of a down market tourist destination for Americans. There were a lot of pretty scuzzy people that -- it was, it was -- the country was known as being very corrupt, you know, and easygoing.

Q: Mm.

FROST: And it attracted kind of not your finer elements. I mean if you look at the map you can see a flight from Miami to Denver is probably equivalent to Miami to Tegucigalpa. So it's a two, two and a half hour flight from the United States. So it doesn't cost a lot to get a ticket.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So a lot of people came and north coast has nice beaches and, you know, tropical climate and so forth, and beautiful scenery. And, and then there are the Bay Islands off the coast, which have an interesting history. Guanaja, Roatán, and Utila, which were originally owned by Britain. And essentially, they traded -- Britain traded them to Honduras for what is now Belize, formally British Honduras in 1960. And the Bay Islands are kind of interesting because they're not mestizo Spanish speaking. They're, they're -- most of their inhabitants are either black or white, but they're not brown, and they come from the Caymans and points in the Caribbean, initially their ancestry, as well as a number of confederate soldiers that decided when they lost the Civil War they didn't want any part of living in the United States controlled by, you know, the Republicans in the, in the north. So they, they took their slaves and moved to Honduras. Or maybe they didn't take their slaves. I'm not sure what happened with slavery, but they moved to the Bay Islands. And it's -- you know, they had this sort of Jamaican, sort of Caribbean twang out there. They speak English; they don't speak Spanish. And they'd really rather be either an independent country, which is kind of ridiculous, or -- but -- or part of Britain or the United States. They gravitate towards -- they don't really -- you know, they really don't want to be part of Honduras, but it's OK because Honduras kind of lets them do what they want in exchange for probably, you know, God knows which payoffs. You know, I mean for every -- all the, all the local magnates on the islands have these, these ocean going freighters that they own. And they basically buy their own -- go to -- go to -- they usually have a favorite port in the States, Mobile, Alabama, Tampa, -- same ports along the south that took the bananas, I guess in a way. And in -- so they go up there and they buy construction materials in bulk and they buy food and they buy, you know, all their stuff and they, they take it down to Roatán, which is the main -- it's really the only island with a significant population. And you know, they don't pay any taxes or duties or anything. There was one, one Honduran -- one lonely Honduran customs officer on the whole island, you know, probably just living in luxury from his payoffs and so forth.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And that's kind of the way it is.

Q: What --

FROST: And it's changed of course since then because the tourism is more developed than it is now --

Q: I was wondering about tourism and all. Was there an equivalent to sort of sex tourism or, you know --

FROST: There was, there was. And like I say, "down market" It's a lot cheaper to go there and do that sort of thing, than it is to go to say Bangkok or Cambodia or --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So it was kind of low end. And there were, there were a number of interesting cases that we had with -- of Americans, you know, in that. There were two in particular that was -- that were very memorable. There was one case where there was, there was a college professor from Florida and he had, he had -- basically he'd gone down there and he'd befriended this family. I think he -- I think the, the -- met one of the, one of the sons, the boys parking cars at the Pizza Hut or something like that and, you know, befriended their whole family, gave the kid a bicycle. And I think he was really recruiting the younger brother or something like that in the end with, with the connivance of the kid's mother, you know, who was desperate for money because they were a very poor family. They -- he, he got -- somehow got the kid to the States on some illegal basis, got him a fraudulent U.S. passport in Florida, and basically kept him as kind of a sex slave for several years in Miami. So until he was, I don't know exactly how he was found out, but anyway, we were involved in -- we gave visas to the family members to testify and, you know, get them up there. This guy, this guy stupidly -- they offered him a plea bargain and he said no, and so they threw the book at him and he got a big sentence in, in Florida. Your typical kind of central casting child molester out of, you know, Coke bottle glasses and --

Q: Oh boy.

FROST: -- kind of stereotype, you know. And the other case was one of our American prisoners that we had there who was a teacher in Philadelphia. The main town in the north coast is La Ceiba, which is just a really cesspool of corruption and sleazy people and, you know, many of them Americans doing God knows what. And he had -- he basically was, you know, recruiting these street kid types, black street kids. There was a large black population right on the coast there. I think they're called garifunas. They originated in the Caribbean. And so he befriended these poor street kids and would take them up to his room and, you know, molest them and so forth, give them food and lure them in. And so he was arrested. And he had a diary, which was extremely incriminating, you know, of all of his exploits. And so he was in jail. So we had to visit him monthly.

The thing is the Honduran justice system was very dysfunctional. I mean, like 90% of the people in jail had never been tried for the crimes they were accused of, and it took years for their cases to make their way through the system, which was trial by -- you know, I -- they used to tell people, you know, don't talk about your client or your brother or whatever having his day in court, it's -- there really isn't a court. It's more like, you know, his file's turn at the top of the judge's inbox kind of thing. You know, trial by paper more or less. It was just very dysfunctional. I mean it was based on the, you know, Spanish law was not exactly a paragon of reason and --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- enlightenment and common sense, you know. The whole structure is just weird for us. And as a result these people languish in jail all this time. And we were basically required to visit the, the prisoners that were pending trial, which was all of them at the time, frequently when I arrived, anyway. About every -- I can't remember it was every month or every three months. It might have even been every month. Anyway, we had a monthly trip where -- north, which we rotated among the Consular Officers, where we would go to San Pedro Sula and, you know, the main commercial city there, which has a sizeable population of Americans and whatnot. And then the north coast, La Ceiba. And we'd visit -- prisoners happen to be in both places. And well, this child molester, I don't think he ever -- he -- I don't think he was convict -- I left -- I think he was still pending when I -- when we left. But he, he -- I was kind of torn, because you know, we weren't supposed to -- he had a lawyer in Philadelphia that was very quiet, you know, because he knew he didn't have a leg to stand on, I guess, you know? And, and a -- I think a brother in Philadelphia at some point. And so -- because it's not exactly a popular crime that he was accused of. And they pretty much did have the goods on it, it looked like. But he, he had -- I was kind of torn because I thought, "I don't want this guy to get released and to go back to Philadelphia and keep doing this," you know, and he -- I don't know what kind of cover story he had for why he suddenly did not report for work that fall, you know, but it was sort of like, you know, he had dysentery, he was sick, or some damn thing, you know. So I don't know what they thought he was up to down there, but I don't -- they, they didn't know. Privacy Act, you know, we're not supposed to tell people about prisoners, you know, unless they authorize us to. And he had not done so. And then his, his -- his stupid brother outed him in the pages of Time and Newsweek, by, "My brother, you know, they should let him out, you know, blah, blah, blah, you know, he hasn't been convicted of anything, you know." And so they kind of did -- that kind of did, you know, relieve me of that burden, moral burden of having to worry about this guy, you know. I thought well, everybody knows about him now, so you know.

Q: How were they treated in jail?

FROST: Well, the jails were weird there, because inside the jail -- you know, being a poor country the jails were pretty abysmal as far as their conditions were concerned and stuff like that. But basically, inside the prison you could run around -- kind of run around loose most of the time. I think they locked them down at night but during the day just came and went. And when I would visit the prisoners we, you know, go out to the little

cantina there, you know, sitting under the trees and, and, you know, drink a Coke with them, you know, buy them a coke, and a sandwich maybe, and talk to them.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And then they just left and they walked, sauntered down the little lane where their quarters were. And so they weren't really treated -- I mean they -- and the thing is that it's kind of like there was in Mexico in the sense that, you know, if you have somebody form the outside -- if you have money and/or somebody from the outside to supply you, you know, with whatever you want, you're fine, you know. But if you're just out there with no money and no family or friends or anybody to come and visit you and bring you stuff then it's kind of difficult, you know. In -- but since it's, since it's -- things were really pretty cheap there, I mean, you know, they were -- I don't think -- they certainly weren't abused or anything.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But it was a pretty subsistence level existence. And the thing was that towards the end of my tour there was, there was a murder case of a Honduran in Arizona who was sentenced to death. And Honduras, like most countries in the world, didn't believe in the death penalty. And so, you know, and so there was kind of an outcry in the country about his poor Honduran sentenced to death in Arizona and this case and so froth. And so I was, I was really afraid for the prisoners that the, you know, would suffer at the hands of the Honduran prisoners in the jail, because like I say, they weren't -- it's not like they were locked up individually or anything like that. I mean it was dangerous, you know. And so basically I, I went to the ambassador and he agreed and so I pushed the government and said, you know, I request that our American prisoners be moved to somewhere safe, you know, until this thing dies down because I fear for their safety and, you know and, you know. And so they accommodated that request and they moved them all to these military bases. And the prisoners were angry at me because they didn't like, you know, they actually had real -- you know, it was real, real prison where they were sent, you know. And they said, "Well, gee, I was really comfortable." They'd sit out under the big – in La Ceiba, there was this huge breadfruit tree out in the yard, you know, and you just -- my guy, the child molester there had a hammock, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And he just, just had his little area there with all of his stuff and his hammock, you know, and he just, he just had his -- had his little area with all his stuff and his hammock and it was comfortable. And then all a sudden he was in a real jail.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: With people guarding him and so forth, and he didn't like it, you know. I Said, "Well, I'm just trying to protect you guys. I'm really worried about you, you know." And so the poor guy, when he moved he lost all his stuff, his pots and pans and other personal

items. It was all stolen and never returned and that really annoyed me. And I tried really hard to get it back for him, but it didn't work. And then there was another guy, the most famous prisoner we -- not famous, but I mean the biggest - it was kind of a headache. The whole case went on about the whole time I was there, is that -- this was, this was a guy who was accused of, of murder. He was, he was kind of half-Honduran, half-American. He had gone to the American school in Tegucigalpa where the embassy kids went when he -- I mean he was in his twenties I think at this point, or maybe older. I can't remember, twenties or thirties. And, and he'd grown up there. His father was Honduran and had a bunch of land, and, and, you know, but completely bilingual and bicultural and so forth, and smart guy. And -- but he had -- he claimed that -- you know, he came -- he, he was living in Miami and then he decided for some reason to come down and, and take possession of his father's lands and live there. He claimed that they were going to build this huge road through the middle of Honduras, which never happened and wasn't very realistic -- there might have been government pipe dream to build this, but it wasn't really realistic, you know, to build a four-lane highway all the way from the north to the south. You know, it'd be nice, but they didn't have the money. But they were somehow they were, they were trying to steal his father's land, you know, to do this, because that's where the road was going to go. So then they were harassing him and so forth.. So I don't know. He shot some guy in the town square in broad daylight. There was no question that he did it. He claimed that it was self-defense, and the other side claimed that he was on drugs when he did it and he was out of his mind. And supposedly they shot his mirror off in his car and this caused him to go ballistic apparently and so he killed this guy. And but he had a sister, he had two sisters that were living in the States that were, you know, his defenders. And the, their Congressmen were involved and, you know, they were -- we've spent an inordinate amount of time visiting him and, you know, fending off all this stuff. You know, I mean, you know, all we could do is argue for a speedy and fair trial, which is a hard thing to produce in the country, you know, you can't sort of snap your fingers and make it happen, you know. And I, I had -- we went quite far in -- I mean, and I was sympathetic to him in a sense, in the sense that, you know, everybody was treated badly by the judicial system, you know? I called it the Honduran "injustice" system, because it really was just no fairness and it was just Byzantine, you know. And so we were advocating on his behalf because, I mean, that he be tried at least. We couldn't say that -- guilt or innocence was another thing, you know. And I even got Ambassador Price -- he was very hesitant to do this, but he ended up doing it--to write a letter to the Chief Justice of Honduras about his treatment by the system. And Price kept saying, "Well gee, I just thinking that this is like the Honduran Ambassador writing to William Rehnquist, and what would we think of that?" I mean it's their system and we're the gringos.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, he did it in the end like I said, because we were getting so much pressure. Because it turned out that the local Congressmen of one of the sisters was the chairman of the House Committee in the House that determined the State Department's budget. He was a very powerful guy, you know, and lobbying on this guy's behalf.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So it was just kind of a constant -- you know, I spent -- I spent hours on the phone with the one sister, she was this kind of passive aggressive but it was all friendly enough. However, when I left, he was still in jail and still not tried. And the sister -- I considered it kind of a nice tribute to me, you know, I got a -- she gave me a nice candy dish *(laughs)*, as a going away present when I left after three years. And this case was already going on under my predecessor and he knew all about it. Of course he was accused of being on the wrong side because he was buddies with a lot of national party politicians, and they were supposedly the evil people who'd been keeping the prisoner in jail and so forth-- it was really quite, quite interesting, the whole, the whole affair.

Q: Was there a drug problem in Honduras?

FROST: It was a trans-shipment point. But both in Honduras and probably elsewhere in that region it was nowhere near the level that it is now I don't believe, but it was still significant. Of course we had DEA there and it was our mission to try to tamp it down and combat it as best we could. There were allegations that all the local magnates out on Roatán, the guys with the ocean going freighters were trafficking in drugs. My predecessor had lots of friends and contacts on the island and introduced me to them.. So I kind of inherited the Bay Islands portfolio from him when I took over as Consul General because most people were told oh, the islands, it's dirty, dirty, dirty, you know, don't even go there, don't -- you know, don't -- those people are bad and they're all running drugs and blah, blah, blah. And I'm not saying that that was completely false, you know, but I didn't -- I wasn't involved in, you know, counter-drug stuff, so I don't really know. But I just felt like saying, you know, "Jeez, I mean if, if you think these guys are dirty, build cases against them and arrest them when they go up to Mobile or, or Tampa or wherever with their boats go, and try them in the U.S. if that's what they're really doing. But I'm tired of all this talk about oh, they're dirty, everybody's dirty, don't even talk to them." And so I was the Control Officer for Creagan when he went out to made his first visit to the islands, because I kept my predecessor's contact and knew my way around the place. And of course, with a lot of American tourists out there--

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and residents and stuff. So it made sense for the Consul General to kind of be the point man. And the islands were completely off the map as far as Honduran politics were concerned, you know. And I did that and I had lots of fun writing the briefing book, you know, with all stories about people out there and who they were and how they were related to each other and so on and so forth.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But anyway there was never a dull moment in Honduras. And there was one other case that, that, that, that was very memorable for, for me too, citizen services kind of thing. And it was, it was a plane crash -- two plane crashes, in fact. The first one was -- and this was toward the end of my tour. It was during the government shutdown and --

was it ’96 or so? We shut down a couple times. Anyway, I was -- I was on -- I think I was even acting DCM at the time, because the DCM was -- her son was having a bar mitzvah or something and her whole family was there. So she took some time off. And the Consular Section was shut -- we shut down for visas, you know, and tight because of -- Mary Ryan ordered us to because she wanted to feel -- people to feel the bite that we actually did something, you know, Consular Officers. And so we were expected not to give anybody a visa, you know, and shut down tight. So we didn’t have really anything to do and most of the -- and some of the staff was furloughed, you know, so. And I think maybe it was -- and, and all -- and this -- all a sudden we got a call that there was a -- there were lot of American missionaries there, and then there was one on the north coast, they were going from -- I think they took off -- they were taking off in La Ceiba on, on the sort of left-hand side there, the western side. And they were flying to Trujillo, sort of the opposite extremity of the developed area of the coast there. And they -- apparently what happened is they took off in a driving rainstorm, which they never should have done. And there’s some very high mountains really very close to the coast there, you know, which are tropical, very, you know, lot of rainforesty kind of place. And they should never have -- people up there said they never should have taken off in a storm. And in the -- but the people on the other end that were supposed to meet them assumed that they couldn’t possibly have taken off in this. And so they weren’t really terribly concerned when they arrived -- when they didn’t arrive, because they assumed they hadn’t taken off. And of course then somehow the people on the other end called to see if they’d gotten there and they said no. And so it was like 24, 36 hours had lapsed when, you know, they were missing. And so, you know, this is really rough country up there. And like I say, it’s pretty, pretty high mountains and rainforest and dense vegetation and so forth. And so a commercial airline pilot happened to see them, see the wreck, you know, from the air where they were down there. And it was really a hike to get up there. And so --we had this base there in Honduras. It was called Soto Cano Air Base where they had an outfit called “Joint Task Force Bravo,” it was a little bit of a hangover leftover from the Contra Wars. They had a helicopter up there with a jungle penetrator, you know, in -- this was a base where they were staffed with TDYers (temporary duty), 180-day TDYers, you know, they had 100 people there I guess. And they had a nice airstrip and so forth. Did a lot of good things for -- you know, for example, if somebody got cut up in a bar fight up anywhere close to there they’d bring them to the base hospital to be treated, you know, and they would help them, you know, because it was kind of -- and they did a lot of -- they did a lot of civil, civil affairs, you know, construction work and built schools and dug wells and, you know, that kind of stuff, kind of goodwill thing. But they had this capacity with this helicopter, the jungle penetrator. So I -- it’s kind of funny, I had sent -- I had sent a Consular Officer -- this happened around the Christmas holidays. And I had sent this Consular Officer who was looking for adventure -- there was a big, there was a big plane crash of a jet liner in Colombia with Americans aboard. So since he didn’t have any work to do -- since we weren’t doing any visas -- he wanted to volunteer to go down there and, and, you know, work on this plane crash. So in, in -- he came back just in time. He was Jewish, so he didn’t have to worry about the Christmas or anything, and he got -- he came back just in time for this thing to happen. So I had a -- I had an experienced plane crash guy on my staff! So I could tell people, without even making it up --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- our seasoned Consular Office, just fresh back from the big plane crash in Colombia, I'm sending him up there, you know?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So he went up with this helicopter, packed his -- he had a bag packed all the time because he was an adventurous guy, you know, and went up -- and went down in this jungle penetrator, you know, they lowered it from the helicopter into the wreck, you know, where it was. And sadly, all the people clearly had been killed on impact, which was good in the sense that the ambassador was -- he said, "Oh, we didn't get there soon enough -- what if we hadn't got there soon enough and, you know." Well, what -- if we hadn't had that helicopter with the jungle penetrator, I think it might have been many days before we could have gotten there.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: I thought we really handled it well and it was kind of frustrating for me because it was kind of well, gee, what would have happened, you know, if they'd survived and then we hadn't gotten to them soon enough? It was quite clear that there was no way that, you know, they just crashed -- it was, I mean trees, trees, trees everywhere. So you know, there was no way anybody was going to survive that. So, so there were -- there, they're all missionaries from the States. You know, some of them were visiting, you know, just temporarily. So it was very sad

Q: Were there Indians in the area and how were they treated if there were?

FROST: Well, there were -- there weren't many. There were the Garifunas, like I said, the black people on the north coast I guess, I guess they were -- I mean they were -- didn't really think of them as Indians, but I guess they were kind of native peoples in a way. And there was the Mosquito Indians on the Mosquito Coast, which is down there toward Nicaragua, you know.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And I can't remember which famous travel writer wrote a -- something on the Mosquito Coast, and it's sort of like, "When you go to the Mosquito Coast, you've gone too far," *(laughs).*

Q: Yeah.

FROST: He says. I don't remember which book that was, but --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, and they were, they were -- there were some -- the Mosquito Indians were up there, you know, but you didn't really hear a lot about them. There was clearly a lot of, you know, the mestizo Spanish speakers ruled Honduras and it was quite clear that they, they were, they were -- there was a fair kind of racism toward black people. And I guess the same with Indians. But it was just kind of, you know, known to be sort of a problem, but not something that people thought about a lot, I guess.

Q: Was there any reflections from the old Soccer War or not?

FROST: Well, yeah, there was kind of a lot of tension on the border between Honduras and, and, and some land issues. Because, you know, there's such a contrast between Honduras and El Salvador in terms of sort of the general industriousness and the people and so forth. You know, the Head of Honduran Immigration who was, who was, you know, corrupt but very interesting, she used to say, -- the Salvadorans go to the States to work, Hondurans go there to get on welfare, you know?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: *(laughs)* She was a Honduran, saying you know, and how, you know, you know, kids with their transistor radios glued to their ear and so forth. And, and so it was -- and they were -- there was kind of some unresolved land disputes and it was just kind of simmering, festering and, you know, that sort of thing. They were not very good relations. And of course, you know, there was that whole war thing, which was long over by then. But it was -- and yeah, it was kind of an interesting dynamic there really.

Q: Yeah.
FROST: And you had -- there was --it was kind of funny, there was a -- there's a joke about -- there's a joke that was going around where there was a guy on, on the Pacific Coast there between the border of Honduras and Salvador. And he said -- and he was collecting crabs along -- this guy was collecting crabs along -- and he had two, he had two baskets there collecting crabs. And a foreigner walks by and says, well, you know, "What-- you're collecting crabs here. Why -- you have two baskets. Why's that?"

He says, "Well, here's the international border right here between Salvador and Honduras. And so I have this bucket for the Honduran crabs and, and this one for the Salvadoran crabs."

And the guy said, "Well, crabs are crabs, aren't they? I mean, what's the difference? How do you know which are Honduran and which are not?"

"And the big difference, because you know, you see the one over here with, with the Salvadoran crabs, it has a lid be -- because -- so they won't climb out and run away. But the Honduran one doesn't have a lid and it doesn't need one because, you know, if every time one of them tries to, to, to climb out, you know, three or four others will grab him and drag him back down."

Q: (chuckles)

FROST: And this was kind of the, the way Honduras was, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: I used to say, you know, I like -- I'm not saying I disliked the people, I made friends there and various charming people and stuff like that. But it was a place where if somebody got ahead there was terrible resentment, you know, and who the hell does he think he is, you know, isn't he a good Honduran, you know, with no ambition and so forth? And so it was sort of like hard to -- and I, I understand that -- I understood them perfectly because I had grown up in the home town where I grew up in Iowa, you may remember when I was talking about it, was kind of a rough place and, you know, I got out because I wasn't really from there, thank goodness, because my parents had lived in D.C. for ten years during the '40s, you know, but people had a hard time to escape some of these -- and Honduras is kind of the same way, you know? You know, it's like a vortex, it kind of sucks you in, you know? And I, I kept saying sometimes I, when -- in -- when I was exasperated with dealing with the government and so forth I said, "Well, you know, here, here I've been a diplomat for, for 20 years, you know, traveled all around the world. And now I'm living and working in a place that's just like the home town that I left that I would never consider living in now."

Q: (laughs)

FROST: You know. But it's just, it was, it was part of the whole low self -- national self-esteem.

Q: Well, what was your impression of -- since you obviously dealt with immigration too. Did you get any feel for how Hondurans did in the States?

FROST: I don't think -- some of them did well, some of them didn't do well, you know, they weren't -- there weren't a lot of really bad people or anything like that. But I don't think they were -- I don't think there were, they were terribly prosperous on the average either.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And, and of course we had a lot of fraud, visa fraud and so forth and, you know, we had, we had the steady flow of legal immigrants and in -- the flow of visitors that, you know, probably many of which -- our refusal rate was pretty high, and yeah, so on and so forth. So, so it was kind of -- it was kind of like an industry, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And fascinating concept.

Q: You were married.

FROST: Yes.

Q: How did you find social life there?

FROST: Well, it was -- let's see, I'm trying to think. It was mainly -- thing is there were, there were such sleaze there that you tended to kind of keep your distance, just to avoid getting sucked in by -- you know, because you -- you know, there were all these social -- the papers would have these social -- you pick -- you'd go to a party, you know, in, and, and you, you know, there'd be all these photographers there and you didn't know who they represented or who they were, and you didn't really want to be photographed next to some guy that was a drug lord or something that you didn't really know.

Q: (laughs)

FROST: So you just kind of, you know, were just a little bit cautious in that in, in, in a sense, and I guess, you know, probably most of our socializing was sort of, you know, internal I would, I would guess. But you know, we -- they had a very active Corps there, you know.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: And, and mo -- the Latin Americans, like my Salvadoran counterpart and other Latin American diplomats, there was a really nice lady from Colombia that was the Consul of Colombia. And so we had, we had monthly meetings and luncheons, you know, and, and even evenings and get-togethers and stuff. And I, I, I got really involved in that because I really liked these people, you know. And I didn't really need to -- they didn't really need -- we didn't really need each other a whole lot, you know, professionally, if you know what I mean. It wasn't sort of -- but they were, they were natural contacts and so forth and we understood each other because we were all diplomats and so forth. And so I was -- I think I was the treasurer of this group at one point. I was, I was elected an officer, and all the others were Latins. And so I was kind of proud of that, you know, I was accepted by these guys and the Salvadoran guy in particular was a really sweet -- was really a sweetheart of a guy, a good friend of mine. And I guess that was -- come to think of it, outside of the embassy that's probably my main -- my main group. And then there were some rich Hondurans, because my, my predecessor introduced to a lot of people because he knew a lot of people. So I kind of continued friendships and relationships, kind of took up where he left off. And others I thought well gee, I don't know, this guy's kind of sleazy to me, I don't know if I want to have much to do with him, and I didn't, you know, just sort of picked and choosed. But the elite of the country, a lot of the richest Hondurans were what they called *"Turcos*" (Turks), which they weren't really -- when -- and they, they were called that because they were basically Middle Eastern people from --

Q: Probably Lebanese.

FROST: Yes. Yes, they were, they were -- they were largely, but they, they first started coming there when it was part of Ottoman Empire and they wanted -- didn't want to be drafted for World War I. And they were largely -- a lot of them were actually Palestinian Christians --

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: -- from a couple of cities on the West Bank or towns on the West Bank, I guess. And I mean that was the original ones that came. But there was a steady flow of them after that as family members joined and others came. And I mean they ended up controlling -- they were very industrious people and you couldn't really tell them, they would intermarry with the population, you know, and of course they would like the same, kind of brown people, you know. And you really couldn't tell that they were different from any other Honduran, you know? And they spoke Spanish, you know, and so forth. And so they were pretty well integrated in that sense, but they were kind of an upper class that -- and there was one coffee company, for example. One family I did become quite friendly with -- they owned a big coffee company-- Café Indio, which is really great coffee there. They had tremendous coffee in Honduras. And we got to know the coffee industry and so forth. But anyway, this guy's father, he said he started a general store somewhere in the south, down by the Pacific, I guess. Didn't -- it went bust and all he had left after when the store went belly up was this coffee mill. So he just started buying up coffee and grinding it and selling it. And this became Café Indio, which is now exports commercial quantities of coffee to the states and make, you know, a lot of money and stuff. But, and so they were -- they were -- they were some really nice folks there. My younger daughter was nine when we got there. We were reasonably active socially, I guess. .Our younger daughter was, was nine when we got there, and she got into horseback riding in a big way—show jumping. So we were friendly with the horsey set, such as it was. And we were very active with parents from the little school she and my son went to. Less so the American school and the French school, which our elder daughter attended.

Q: Oh yeah.

FROST: -- Overall, it was really a fun tour. Toward the end there was a big plane crash involving a Wisconsin National Guard C-130 that ran off the end of the runway in the airport, destroying a bridge over highway, but luckily enough, nobody on the ground was hurt. But several people on the plane were killed and also badly injured in the hospital. And so Honduran authorities had -- I was, I was, I was just coming back from, from a vacation. I can't remember where I was, but I was in El Salvador on the way home when I read about this plane crash that already happened. And so my deputy was handling it and I got there and he was doing such a good job I said, "Well, I'm just going to, you know, come to me whenever you need help or advice, but I'm going to let you keep handling it, because you're the guy, you know, and this your baby here, you know, and I'm just -- I'm going to back you up" Some of the airmen were badly burned and so forth

and they were in the hospital and there wasn't much in the way of medical care there, but they were being held for questioning or something like that. And here they were with these drips and they were just lying there and stuff like that. And my deputy went out there and he, he just, you know, I don't know how he did it, but he said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. These people are going to die and it's going to be on your head, you know?" And, and the government relented and let them go, you know, and, and the Defense Attaché said "that Consul is a true hero." I was so very proud of him.

Q: Yes.

FROST: -- So nice to hear. But I can think of -- I mean I can go on for hours just telling you interesting stories from the realm of Consular work in Honduras, you know, because we really got -- you know, we, we got into the American Services cases -- the prisoners were almost like our friends, you know, I mean because we knew, we knew --

Q: Oh yeah. Well, one gets --

FROST: And, and, and, you know, there was one guy, there was a guy that was arrested for timber piracy. You know, he was, he was allegedly, you know, harvesting forests and selling the, you know, the lumber and stuff like that. The main problem in Honduras was that, even if you wanted to do something the legal way, it was really hard to do because nobody had ever done it before! And all the precedents were sleazy, you know? And he was in jail and he, poor guy had cancer, you know, and, and, and so he was -- and they let him have treatments, stuff like that, and he was out under house arrest. But one Consular Officer went to visit him and he was shocked because he got his food and put a whole -- had a bottle of Tabasco sauce at all times at the table and just poured the stuff all over his food. And she said, "Don't do that!" you know? He finally died there. He was a long time resident, you know. That Vice Consul went to his funeral and, you know, it was very sad. He was kind of like one of our friends, you know, sleazy as he may have been. But it was just -- oh, it -- I -- it -- bring back a lot of memories just talking about it.

Q: Well, by this time the Cubans were pretty quiet, weren't they? They weren't messing around there?

FROST: No. They were -- they, they weren't. It wasn't, wasn't -- I'm not even sure they had any Cuban doctors there. They might have, but you know, everybody had those generally in Latin America.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But -- and there was a contact of my, my predecessor who was a Cuban American guy who owned a radio station in the San Pedro Sula who was -- had been on -- been part of the Bay of Pigs, you know, and he was accused of -- he, he was playing, you know, pirated movies on his TV -- I guess he had a TV station I think, yeah, actually. And he was playing -- he was intellectual property violator. He was playing first-run movies on his cable channel, stuff like that, without permission. And you know, that, so

that wasn't good. That was a guy that I didn't continue to have a relationship with after that, although he had been a friend of my predecessor.

Q: Well, after this sort of interesting post, where did you go?

FROST: Well, let's see. By this time, it was funny, I was kind of desperate to make the Senior Foreign Service. I felt like had I punched all the tickets, War College, DCM, Principal Officer, and that the last thing I needed to do was to be an FS-1 Consular Chief in a place like Tegucigalpa. And so I was kind of discouraged because I was -- my time was starting to run short and I wasn't getting it. And so I confided in Mary Ryan, who I didn't really know well, but she was so very open and approachable as Head of Consular Affairs. And so she just said, "Don't worry about it. Just, just take it easy, you know you're doing a good job, your reward will come eventually in due course, So last one year before I was due out of Honduras I did get the promotion to Senior Foreign Service. The first person that sent me an email of congratulation me was Mary Ryan and she said, "Congratulations--where do you want to go next?" And she took care of my onward assignment personally!

Q: Oh, wonderful.

FROST: And I was assigned as Consul General and Country Consular Coordinator in Brasilia, Brazil. The Consular Section really wasn't any larger than Tegucigalpa's, but I was responsible for supervising Consular operations in the entire country, which included large Consulates in Rio and São Paulo and a small one in Recife, and 5 one-person Consular Agencies. It looked really interesting to me.

Q: Well, what about -- did you have to take sort of the Spanish into Portuguese course?

FROST: Well, that's -- apparently there's a kind of a myth that there's even such a thing, the "conversion" course everybody talks about. And, and I was told well, there are conversion materials, but there's not a conversion course, although they do try to group Spanish speakers together because they've got kind of a base and, you know. There are a lot of similarities between the languages and a lot of differences. But since I, you know, I found that it's somewhere between Spanish and French in terms of difficulty, and so I had it kind of bracketed, you know. Oh no, I'm sorry. It was, it was not as -- Spanish was in the middle and then you had French, which was harder, and then Portuguese, which was harder than Spanish, but not as hard as French -- so Portuguese was in the middle between Spanish and French, I guess that's what you'd say. But there were similarities in both languages. But I didn't have much time to take it. Nobody seemed to be worried about me taking it because I didn't have, you know, I basically left -- I got them to let me leave Honduras in May rather than July or August --

Q: What year?

FROST: -- 1998. I needed to get there in time for my kids to start school in August. So basically I had six weeks of Portuguese only and they tried to put me in -- the first teacher

I had was Portuguese-Portuguese. And they found out I was going to be Consul General and they said, "No, you can't do that in Brazil. No, you got to have a Brazilian teacher." So they switched me over. And I got a got a 2+, 3 at the end of six weeks, which I think was pretty good.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: I didn't speak well by any means, but it was good enough. And then I continued while I was there.

Q: So you were there from '98 --

FROST: In Brazil?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Yeah. In Brazil, I was there from '98 to 2002. I --

Q: Oh, OK.

FROST: They made it a four-year tour, and I signed on to that.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FROST: Let's see. When I got there it was vacant. It had formally been Mel Levitsky.

Q: Uh-huh.

FROST: But he had left and Jim Derham was the chargé for like a year my first year there, in fact. So there was no ambassador when I got there. And then we had another chargé for a while, Jerry Gallucci. And then Chris Orozco came up from Rio for awhile to be chargé for a while-- he was CG (Consul General) in Rio before that. And then we had a political appointee Ambassador, Tony -- Anthony Harrington, who, who came in for couple years. And then Donna Hrinak succeeded him. So there was kind of a lot of movement into and out of the front office at the time.

Q: Well, Brasília, Brazil is sort of still not a -- kind of I guess attractive building set in sort of --

FROST: Yeah, well, you know what I described it as? I quite liked it actually. It's a great family post, Seeing as I had three kids it was a very pleasant place to live, we really loved it. And -- but what it reminded me of is, is I called it "Retro Futurism," because it's kind of like, you know, look -- think of Tomorrowland at Disney. I don't know whether you've been there or not. But you know, they have, they have the Monorail. Now, did Monorails ever take off? No. You know, and it was the city of the future that never became the norm, was never replicated, so it wasn't really the city of the future. It was

the city of the future in 1955 or 1960, a future that turned out differently and didn't include any more cities like this.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know. And so it was just this kind of, like I say, retro-futurism, there was a place for everything and everything in its place. The idea is that you had an area earmarked for every activity-- there was a banking sector, there was the hotel sector. There was -- they even had the horse sector where all the stables were supposed to be located. This was part of the master plan is, you know. And the streets were all -- they hadn't -- they didn't have names, they had numbers. So -- and it was all subdivided into -- there was, there was -- you know, and, and, and the master -- there was -- a lot of deviation had occurred, you know, and they finally gave up, I guess. But I mean most of it followed the master plan, there were these axes and stuff and, and one of the high school kids there called it "the city where the streets have no names," and it kind of was. And then there were these two artificial lakes that kind of divided the city with bridges over them and, and what I called pseudo-freeways, because they had clover leafs and exit and entry ramps, but the thing is there were no merge lanes. So I mean if you'd, if you'd think of, you know, the Beltway or these places here and, you know, and if you try -- if you had -- you had to basically stop to make sure there was nobody coming because they -- otherwise you'd be plowed as you'd try to merge because there were no merge lanes. So they were pseudo, very tight little cloverleafs and stuff, because this is, mind you, 1960 vintage stuff. It certainly wasn't Rio you know, didn't have the party scene or atmosphere and stuff like that. And a lot of the, a lot of the people would -- the government people would-- go home to São Paulo or Rio or somewhere else on most weekends, you know fly in and out.

Q: Well, in many ways, even with the Brazilians, it's not a very permanent population.

FROST: Yeah, a friend of mine who was a fellow Africa hand and Admin Officer when I got there described as "Africa with a barcode." I mean, there was nothing there when they built it. And, and even, even now you get off the road and there's red dirt and dust like they have in Africa, and very few sidewalks.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Everything is not paved over, you know? But it -- yeah, it, it, it was, it was a strange -- it was a very unique city.

Q: Well, first place, what was the government like in your perspective during these four years?

FROST: Well, let's see. Fernando Enrique Cardoso was President when I arrived and he was finishing his first 4 year term and running for re-election, which he -- which he won by a wide margin.. So out time there spanned his second term, pretty much. The election of Lula, who ultimately replaced him, was held just after we left. Cardoso was a very

intelligent academic economist professor type had who had already successfully launched a new, stable currency, the real, which really knocked hyperinflation on its butt and stabilized the economy. And so he was really very much responsible for what Brazil had become. And a result, he was quite popular, not a charismatic man of the people type, but a wise and respected leader. It was a time when the country was clearly advancing and widely perceived to be. You may have heard the old saying, "Brazil is the country of the future and always will be." But things were clearly moving in the right direction, and while the hoped for future had not quite arrived, people could see or at least sense it on the horizon. They had a Foreign Ministry that was very professional. Looking back at my previous post, I thought gee, this is a real, serious country I've landed in, lots of money, big, modern cities of a million people with tall buildings that nobody in the United States has ever even heard of, a continental nation. Compared to Honduras, for example, it's just like night and day. Yet, somehow the attitude prevailing attitude, perhaps a hangover from the past, was still the kind of insecure "negative nationalism" more worthy of a banana republic with little to be proud of. There was a widespread fear that we Americans were trying somehow take over the Amazon. The Brazilians dragged their feet on negotiating a free trade agreement with us—"The Americans will screw us and we'll get a bad deal." This kind of defensiveness was no longer appropriate for a nation such as Brazil was becoming, in my opinion.

Q: I was interviewing Peter Romero --

FROST: Uh-huh.

Q: -- who was Assistant Secretary. And we talked about during the time he was dealing with all Latin America, said he was surprised at the attitude. Because we were talking about the Brazilian Foreign Service, which has a very high-end reputation, but he said that they always seem to have in dealing with the United States was the zero sum game. And so --

FROST: That's exactly right. Exactly right.

Q: Anything that, you know, we might say want, you know, diplomatically. Let's do this or any deal, the Brazilians immediately took the other side because --

FROST: Yeah, yeah, uh-huh.

Q: -- I mean as a reflexive thing.

FROST: Well, that's exactly right, and that's the perfect way to characterize it. The Foreign Ministry, called *Itamaraty* after the name of the palace in Rio where it was located before the capital was moved to Brasilia, had its own school, called *Rio Branco*, where all the career foreign service people were trained. And they were so very professional. But attitudinally, they were much like the denizens of Mexico's foreign ministry, SRE, just more professional in their execution, whereas Mexico was very amateurish at this kind of stuff. Brazil was very heavy into reciprocity, and they would

often cut off their nose to spite their face in its name. I used to joke that *Rio Branco* must have 4 years of required "reciprocity studies" courses. They weren't unfriendly—that wouldn't be professional—but they were a very difficult government to deal with. I mean it was kind of funny because while I was there, in fact, Peter Romero himself, who was retired by then--he was doing some consulting work or something--was passing through Rio or São Paulo on his way home from elsewhere in South America.. One of the big problems was with Americans arriving without visas, you know, because visas were required. And so we worked out this kind of informal arrangement where we could -- on a case by case basis we could, we could waive people, you know, and get them in anyway. And, and so it was a real pain, you know, because we didn't want people such as eminent professors and the head of AOL who was establishing a big operation there, to be denied entry and put back on a plane for lack of a visa. So I get a call at the office after 5 one day that Peter Romero had arrived with his old unexpired diplomatic passport but with an expired Brazilian visa.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: He was at the airport in Rio or São Paulo where we couldn't reach anyone, and so I got on to *Itamaraty* in Brasília to try and persuade them to cut him a break. I don't know, but I think perhaps he took more umbrage at his treatment that might have been wise with them, and they had already told him "No, we're going to put you on the first plane." He wanted to go to Miami, because that was where he was headed, but they put him on the first plane out, which happened to be to Houston, which was out of his way. It was very frustrating to deal with. I had very good relations with the Head of Consular Affairs at the Foreign Ministry. He was a once and future ambassador. And I liked him a lot and got – we had many mutually productive dealings. But as far as trying to get reciprocity in visas, for example, they wanted to -- everything was cast in stone in their constitution or at least mandated by law it seemed like. We were trying to get them, for example -- we got tired of giving -- there were a lot of Brazilian students and they were but they needed a visa and it was 12-month reciprocity. Very few American students there, you know, but many Brazilian students in the States. And so these kids would have to chase after a new visa every time they run back home on vacation? And we wanted to give these kids 4 or 5 years, but they couldn't extend that validity to us. They said, "Oh well, the thing is, it's codified in the law that it's 12 months for students. And so this is not worth it for us to, to put a bill in the Congress so we can't help you." And there were annoying fees that couldn't be changed and stuff like that. So I just made no headway on this stuff. I tried really hard, but you know. So it was a -- it was kind of a frustrating government to deal with. And there was a telecommunications company that had made a major investment there and they were trying to -- I can't remember whether it was a question of actually nationalizing it, but they were having a lot of problems and that was a big issue. It was frustrating government to deal with.

Q: Yeah. Well, this sort of -- well, one of the things -- I mean we're not ones to talk, but had a lot of lawyers there. And of course we have a lot of lawyers, but as Americans we don't pay that much attention to them. I mean we kind of get around things mainly I think. But was the main visa or citizenship work was in Rio and São Paulo?

FROST: Yeah, much more so than Brasilia. As I recall, there were very few immigrant visas issued and they were all in Rio. So it was mainly, it was mainly NIVs of various types. And I think there were 250,000 annually in São Paulo, 200,000 in Rio, 58,000 in Brasília, and 15 or 20 thousand in Recife--so mainly Rio and São Paulo. And so I just exercised kind of light supervision over -- you know, quarterly visits to all these posts generally, you know. And you know, on the phone with them quite a lot, kind of trying to standardize and coordinate stuff. When I got there, there had been a, a -- some, you know, there were a lot of claims that, that, you know, Consular Officers were racist and discriminated against blacks and were refusing them unjustly and stuff like that. So one of my goals was to kind of try and tamp that down and stop that -- stop the bad press that we were getting. And of course, you know, there's of a racial problem in Brazil, you know, because there is a lot of discrimination against --

Q: Well, this is what I understand. I mean they boast they don't have it, and yet, it's probably as class-ridden a society as any --

FROST: It is, you know, and it's sort of like there are these, you know, overlapping circles of, you know, you know, they -- these overlapping circles of poor people and black people, you know --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- and they overlap, you know, overwhelmingly. So you know, all black people are not poor.

Q: No.

FROST: And all poor people are not black. But I mean there's a high correspondence.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And our black officers sometimes have trouble. They might go into their apartment building in Rio or São Paulo, you know, big high-rise, you know, "grand standing," as the French would call it. And they point them toward the servants' because they're black so they must be servants. This kind of stuff used to drive people crazy. So they kind of tend to project that onto us, I think in a way. I mean not that we haven't had our own problems, you know. But generally speaking, I mean the people, you know, you know, when -- people were really sort of like, "You discriminate against poor people," you know. "Consular Officers discriminate against poor people." Well, I guess we, I guess we sort of do, you know. I mean that's not discrimination --

Q: That's not discrimination, it's --

FROST: They're more likely to be refused, you know --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Not because they're poor, per se, but because they're not likely to come back.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: They're likely to stay and work and --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- so on and so forth; So, so you can't win. And before I got there, several years before I got arrived, there was a big case. There was a Vice Consul in São Paulo and, and São Paulo was just a big visa mill. They had apparently these little abbreviations they would use on the forms when people were refused, sort like LP, Looks Poor, TR, Talks Rough, you know, to distinguish the kind of people that they were getting, you know. And this was kind of a -- the Consular Officers used this little shorthand and stuff like that. And it wasn't really right, you know, but it wasn't really a terrible, terrible thing, just not very professional. So there was a Vice Consul there. Apparently he just couldn't -- I don't know, he wasn't pulling his weight and he couldn't say no and, you know, he -- I think is problem was that he, he had, he'd, you know, he was -- he'd gone to Harvard Law School and he came into the Foreign Service when he was age 50 and maybe had trouble just being an entry level line officer, which wasn't always fun, instead of being somebody that was more important. I don't know what his problem was and I never met this guy. But I did -- his Portuguese teacher -- my Portuguese was his Portuguese teacher and talked about him. He was the only guy at FSI that wore a suit every day including the ambassadors. And so anyway, but he was kind of a bad fit for the Foreign Service, I guess. And when they weren't going to give him tenure, he suddenly revealed this "racist" system that was -- he was white, he was Swedish-American guy from Minnesota or something I think, but he revealed this "racist" system that the Vice Consuls were using. And he never, you know, he never complained about it before, you know. But then all of a sudden he causes a lot of stink and filed a lawsuit and, and, and this was in the press in Brazil and did a lot of -- anyway, this was kind of this negative history, you know. So I was really quite sensitive to that and trying to get the officers to, you know, pay attention to -- and I was proud that we had virtually no incidents like this that I -- that came to light, you know. So it was -- that was good.

Q: But I mean this always has the problem that somebody -- I mean when I was Consul in Belgrade, one of the poorest provinces was in Macedonia. And we had people from Macedonia coming up to get visas to see the World's Fair in Montreal.

FROST: *(laughs)*

Q: Well, you know, and then they would of course get across the border. I mean, you know, it's like somebody in the poorest areas of Washington D.C. saying they want to go to the Osaka World's Fair. You know, what the hell is this? I mean, you know, doesn't make any sense.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: But the point was there were special plane trips and I mean there was all sorts of stuff --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- that you could get into. But once you got Canada you could slip across the border.

FROST: Yeah.

Q: Or settle in Canada. But the Canadians probably are a little more careful than we were. But, but then we get accused of being against poor people. Well, the law is against poor people

FROST: Yeah, yeah. But it was -- the thing was -- the interesting thing was that it all changed. I guess it was about five months in. I think, you know, it was January of '99. Basically, the -- all of a sudden the, the currency crashed vis-à-vis the dollar. And it was, it was, it was better than one-to-one, I think, when I got there in the fall. And it dropped as low as four-to-one. I think maybe finally settled at I think closer to three-to-one, overnight, within the space of a month. And this had a dramatic effect on, you know, it used to be -- I mean think of if you wanted to go to Disney, which was the most popular, a valid destination to Brazilians. Many went there, some just used it as an excuse to get a visa, I guess. But Disney was the Mecca, you know, in Florida. You know, Disneyworld, you know. They *had* to go to Disney. But whereas it cost you, you know, one real for your dollar before, say, and then it cost you three or four. And you couldn't afford it anymore.

Q: No.

FROST: On the other hand, if you're going to go and work in Massachusetts, which is where they all went to or -- because there were Portuguese speaking people from --

Q: From the Azores and all.

FROST: -- Cape Verde and stuff. And that's how it all started. Then, then your dollar -- you can send more money home when --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- your dollars are worth more when you send them home to your relatives.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So we noticed a definite trend where the overall volume went down, you know, because the Disney people were just not going anymore, not applying. But of the people that were still applying, there was a much higher percentage of applicants that were weren't qualified. So the visa refusal rates skyrocketed while the volume went down. It took years to recover from that big dip there. And so that was, that was kind of an interesting phenomenon that happened while I was there. Also, I remember when, when Lula was campaigning to succeed Cardoso, just before I left post. Thinking back to Peter Romero's zero sum game, you know, "If it's good for the U.S., then it must be bad for Brazil." This kind of kind of defeatist attitude about the free trade negotiations prevailed until Lula came along--"Oh, they'll find some way to screw us." But Lula just said, "Look, you know, we're going to negotiate as hard as we can on this," -- what was it called, FTAA, Free Trade Area of the Americas, "we're going to negotiate as hard as we can, get the best deal we can for Brazil, you know, and, and, and then we're going to sit back and look at what we've got and, you know, if it looks like overall it's in our interest we'll sign it, and if it's not, we won't sign it.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: "And that's what we're going to do." And I thought, "That's really an adult behavior for a country, you know."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: There's a model of human called "Transactional Analysis" that says that, in every social transaction, each party tends to assume one of three roles –parent, adult, or child. In the cases of Honduras, Mexico, and the old Brazil, this "this negative nationalism" that I have been talking about is due to the fact that we tend to act the parent and they act the child. The parent role has a good side and a bad side--There's the nurturing parent, which is good, and there's the discipline-heavy parent, which is bad.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And then there's the child. There's the child wonderment thing, which is good, and then there's the petulant child.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so it's kind of like, you know, we slip into this adult role, you know, as the scolding United States, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And they slip into the petulant child role, you know, throwing a tantrum and *(laughs).* So there's, there's a lot of that involved in this relationship I guess, you know, and, and the best thing to have, of course is adult-to-adult, you know, which is --

Q: Oh yes.

FROST: -- you know. But not always easy.

Q: Did you have much in the way of Americans in trouble?

FROST: No, very -- very little, I guess. We had some interesting extradition cases. And --

Q: Did we have a extradition treaty?

FROST: I'm trying to think? I think we -- yeah, I think we --

Q: Because, you know, for years the United States, the Brits, the whole thing was you fled to Brazil where they couldn't get extradited.

FROST: Yeah. I don't know. That seems to be kind of an urban legend—Ronnie Biggs…

Q: I think it was more a urban legend.

FROST: I'm trying to think. I think they had an extradition treaty that we were hoping to improve, but never really got anywhere on and, you know, but I mean it was workable, functional, I guess. At one point they thought Whitey Bulger was there, you know, that, that --

Q: Yeah, from --

FROST: -- Italian mafiosi from Boston, you know. I was mad at heck -- I mean it was, you know, we got this rocket from the FBI, we think he's there and want to move on him, you know, and got this tip and -- so I had to go over to I*tamaraty* where these things move like molasses as in all countries, and Brazil was, you know, probably -- I don't know whether they were, they were at least as, as bureaucratic as anyone, so -- if not more so. So I mean they're never fast and immediate, you know, and often don't turn out the way we want them to, but I had to go down and basically say, "This guy's really important, you know, and he got to -- we want to see if we can really grease this thing to go through fast," because he's a really big deal," getting them all spun up, and then having to go back a few days later and tell them "Sorry he's not her after all, their tip was wrong." I called in all my chits for nothing.

Q: Well, how about people in jail? Were there many Americans involved or?

FROST: Very, very few.

Q: Mm-hmm.

FROST: I, you know, it's just hard to -- I have so many memories of people in jail, you know, the ones that I, that I was telling you about was just, you know, a mere fraction of what there were. Not that they were numerous, but they were all interesting cases.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: In Brazil -- oh, we had -- there was, there was a, a, a case where there was -- there was a, a, a apparently, a molester type in -- up in the Amazon in, in Manaos. We had, we had a lot of consular agents in Brazil. We had -- where, where previously there'd been consulates, there were Salvador da Bahia, there was Manaos, and Belém in the Amazon. Porto Alegre down in the south and -- is that it? Porto Alegre down in the south and -- was that it? Fortaleza, I guess.

Q: Mm.

FROST: And so we had these consular agents, you know, that were part timers that helped us with the Americans here. This guy was arrested for -- I think he was like suspicion of molesting some girl or something. And he was a -- he was a scientist at one of the national laboratories in the States, a government employee, you know. And it was quite clear -- there was a huge cloud of suspicion. Somehow -- somehow, he got out and left, you know, and the consular agent up there said, "I just know that this guy's up to something. He's taking pictures of some girl on the beach, you know, down, down by the river, you know, and acting suspiciously and all this stuff." And so he, but he -- he -- he sort of bought his way out somehow or talked his way out and left, which was less of a problem for us, you know. And I don't know what he told his employers back in New Jersey because what -- subsequently he went -- he traveled to Ecuador and was arrested for child molesting there -- arrested, you know, and put in jail. Where I don't know whatever happened to him, but you know, finally it turned out that his security -- he had a top-secret clearance and all this stuff, and it was revoked.

Q: Well, you know, it used to be -- I come from sort of the old Foreign Service. And we used to have quite a bit of correspondence, one consul saying watch out for this guy and that guy, and now under privacy regulations you, you really didn't know whom you were dealing with. Was this true or?

FROST: Well, let's see. A little -- of course now, I guess, I think, I think it's moved in -- back in the other direction. Maybe that was because of 9/11, all the systems we now have to keep track of people and stuff like that. I mean the laws have not changed, but somehow the reality is closer to the old days I think than it used to be. And it's easier -- it's easier, you know, because there used to be -- I mean you had to keep a file and that was, you know, but on the other hand every official transaction now goes into the system. You know, for example, if somebody -- you know, then there are lookouts, you know, that, that are --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Rather these orange cards that you might remember back in the old days.

Q: Yeah. It used to --

FROST: Now it's all -- now it's all in a database, you know, so --

Q: Yeah, and --

FROST: -- if a guy applies for a passport you can see his whole history.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, you know, and where -- whereas before you couldn't, you know? I mean I used to -- in Honduras we talked about the sleaze factor, and I'd tell the Vice Consul, I'd say, "Now, bear in mind that when you approach -- you're at the ACS (American Citizen Services) window and you're dealing with, with a citizen, you know, whatever his problem is or the service he's seeking is, just keep it in the back of your mind that this guy might be a convicted felon, a federal fugitive, a child molester. You don't know, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so just, just, just bear -- just, just be careful with people, you know?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Because -- and, and we had -- we had so many, so many -- and then I Brazil there was sort of -- there didn't seem to be a lot of this happening, I don't know, as far as --

Q: I don't think of Brazil as being a place where -- I mean people going down for Carnival, I suppose, you know, might get a little carried away by all the --

FROST: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And the government's pretty laid back, you know. It was -- I was just trying to figure out how this, how this was as quasi-fascist dictatorship a few short decades before. I just -- they just seem to laid back to be, you know, the Nazis that they evidently were back in the days of military rule. I just -- it's just hard for me -- didn't compute for me that they could be that, that authoritarian, the way they were, you know, because they were so -- they were, you know, quite laid back, you know. And we had a -- we had a -- had a child abduction case in São Paulo where the, the mother, Brazilian mother took the -- took the child and, and, and said she was going to the beach. But instead she got on a plane to Brazil and the usual -- kind of like that one that was in the news more recently, you know, a little bit. The father was trying to get -- move to Brazil, Cuban American from Miami trying to get custody. A messy case. And they weren't -- they weren't a Hague Convention country, you know, so -- and that was, that was kind of -- and he was, you know always calling -- that consumed a certain amount of

energy. Never got satisfaction, I don't think. But -- and yeah, there was -- it was not -- it was not a big problem though overall. Neither in volume or seriousness I would say overall.

Q: Well, how did your family find life in Brasília?

FROST: Oh, they loved it. Elder daughter graduated from high school there. They had a very good American school in Brasília. I was a member of the board for a couple of years. And my younger daughter was a national level equestrian -- Brazil had a top riding program and so we ended up owning two horses while we were there. So that was a major part of our life, going out and watching her ride in competitions. And our son finished grade school there. We all had a great time there and it was a wonderful experience.

Q: Did you get out in the Amazon much or did you have much business out there?

FROST: I only went out there once on a sort of familiarization trip to meet the Consular Agent. And my wife is still mad at me because we never made it up there as tourists. We just didn't get around to it and kept putting it off and then we left. And I went to Manaus and Belém, you know, and --

Q: Did you see the opera house at Manaus?

FROST: Oh, beautiful, yeah.

Q: I'm told it's really something.

FROST: It's, it's extraordinary. That whole thing with the rubber industry you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: It's such a fascinating -- you hear the story about the, about the Kew Gardens and all this stuff? What happened in the end of the rubber industry?

Q: No. What was --

FROST: Well, the rubber industry in Brazil, the trees grew naturally--they were just out in the forest. And they had -- I can't remember what the Portuguese name for these rubber guys are, but basically you were -- you, you go out and tap these trees, you know, and kind of go out -- and bring -- and come back and bring the rubber. And a lot of these people would die because of the tropical diseases that they would get out there in the forest from tromping around. But I mean it was -- it wasn't plantations, in other words, because these trees were wild.

Q: Oh.

FROST: And then this, this -- so Britain had their eye on this and there was so much money in it because rubber was just starting to -- tires and cars were just starting. And so, so -- around the turn of the century in -- so they -- you know, there's this story – people sent their shirts, literally, to London to be laundered. And they'd come back on a ship later and stuff like that. And then you had this opera house and all this money. And, and then this, this -- the British had this idea, they, they went and they got a bunch of seedlings and did this clandestinely, you know. And, and put them on a ship, float them down the Amazon, all these seedlings, and took them to London and planted them in the Kew Gardens, you know. And then took them to Malaysia where they transplanted them and established plantations. So I mean the -- when that -- once those plantations started producing, I mean the Brazilian rubber industry went belly-up, literally overnight. The ships stopped coming --

Q: Because it was too hard to ship it out.

FROST: Well, in Malaysia the Brits build huge plantations with only rubber trees one after the other…no more tromping around in the forest looking for wild trees—Brazil's industry couldn't compete with that. So the opera house was closed down, but was preserved. There was one in Belém too, which is a -- is, is just as grandiose as the one in Manaus, but it's different, very -- you know, and, and, and I went, went, went to both of them. And they're just fabulous. You get some idea of, you know, of what the wealth was in those days. And, and then -- of course Salvador de Bahia was where they had he sugar plantations, you know, and, and there's a museum in, in, in Salvador where they have all this beautiful silver jewelry that was worn by the slaves, because it was a mark of the owner's wealth to outfit his slaves in, in silver jewelry. And there wasn't very many places for them to run away to, you know, out in the middle of the jungle and so forth. A fascinating history.

Q: Did the missionaries cause you a problem?

FROST: No, not -- they did -- they really didn't. They're, you know, they were -- in fact, this was true of all the countries I guess in Latin America where I served -- there were maybe not Mexico so much, but there were -- there were a lot of Mormon missionaries and they were very organized and they took care of their own people and they had wardens and lists and so forth and they were very good --

Q: Yeah, they really take care of --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- their own. I mean it's not --

FROST: But no, they were -- you know, they were, they were not really problems, I don't think. They -- a lot of --

Q: I was think --

FROST: -- a lot of them were pretty well embedded in the society, in the country, and lived there for -- I remember my deputy had -- there's some older American lady that had lived there for decades and decades. And I didn't -- he attended to her one day and he comes to me in Brasília and says, "It's like she just stepped out of the dustbowl in 1930's, you know, which is where she was from in Oklahoma," you know, and she, she moved to Brazil and became a missionary. And you know, she's like an American form a bygone era. She's hardly ever been back, you know.

Q: One of those --

FROST: She sounds like an Oakie, you know --

Q: Like Dorothy Lang or --

FROST: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: -- pictures of --

FROST: And then, but there was this kind of -- and then there was -- there's, there's some interesting people from -- I -- I'm trying to think of whether I -- yeah, we counted some -- there are some, some sort of, I don't know, Russian or Ukrainian type people who settled in far flung places like Alaska, you know --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- Western Canada, Brazil -- there was lots of land and wheat and crops and stuff, you know. And, and they looked kind of folkloric -- some of these people look like folk dancers, only that's what they really wear. You know, with these little bonnets and stuff like that.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, they get married at 16, little education, a couple centuries behind the times, very traditional. They were quite prosperous, the crops they raised were sold and the government left them alone.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And the government doesn't bother them, and they are allowed to maintain these self-contained communities. But there was one young woman that contacted us for assistance, one of those married at 16 types, US citizen. We had a contact down in the area where they were. And she was claiming she was being beaten by her husband, spousal abuse. She wanted out. And she had a cell phone, you know, so we were able to communicate with her and basically kind of engineered her escape, you know. And this, this contact of ours helped us out. He's like a police contact I think down there. So, and

so, and so we somehow got her out to Brasília and put her on a plane to the States, you know, to wherever she called home, you know, because she just wanted out. And the government wasn't helping because it's sort of like well, gee, we don't' really bother these people, we're not going to get involved and, you know, you know, and she's really not a citizen of our country anyway so we don't care, you know. And, and this -- that was fascinating, these people, you know, it's kind of like a throwback to --

Q: I would think that, you know, one --

FROST: They don't really recognize modernity concepts of borders and nationality are really kind of alien to these people. I guess you could say they were tribal.

Q: You know, I have visions of -- you know, sort of in a amphibious little plane landing on the back waters of the Amazon and a couple missionaries go out to make contact with a tribe that has never been contacted before, and then they disappear or something. You didn't have any of that problem.

FROST: No, not that we knew of, anyway.

Q: Yeah, I mean --

FROST: We, we, we did, we did have a woman who got lost in the Amazon and, and, and it was kind of tense for a while. But she was found and she just got -- wandered off and gotten separated from, you know, where she was supposed to be. One of our consular agents managed the case--those consular agents were all really helpful, they were great.

Q: Was the deforestation of the Amazon basin an issue that somehow or another our embassy got involved with?

FROST: Well, you know, that's a -- our position was clear as far as trying to stop it, but we didn't -- I don't think it was a big, you know, probably there was a lot of stuff that went on that I wasn't really involved in. I think it's come to the for as an issue more in the intervening years.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: But it was, it wasn't -- it wasn't -- it wasn't -- I was --

Q: Nothing political or economic anyway.

FROST: Yeah, yeah.

Q: But I was just wondering if others spilled over at all.

FROST: Really not. I guess there was a, there was a, there was an American nun or something, some kind of an activist I think that was murdered -- I think that was maybe

after I left this all came down. You know, she'd been down there for years and she ruffled the feathers of some of the --

Q: Yeah, some of the people who were --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: -- intruding on native --

FROST: Yeah.

Q: You know, developers, you might call them.

FROST: Yeah. Because there are parts of the country, you know, in, in the, in the northeast, which is the poorest part of the country, where it was kind of a feudal society pretty much and you ha these landlords of huge, huge, you know, hundreds, you know, tracks and land the size of countries and stuff like that.

Q: They had little armies.

FROST: But basically, but yeah, it was very, you know, it was very feudal, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And, and the politics were, you know, sort of like 19th century machine kind of stuff. And the political parties were always weak in Brazil.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So it was more of a *personalismo* kind of thing, you know? But.

Q: Well, when did you leave there?

FROST: We left in 2002.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So I was there from 1998, 2002.

Q: OK, well I think 2002, leaving Brazil, where did you go?

FROST: Buenos Aires, Argentina, which is my last post.

Q: OK, so we'll pick that up then.

FROST: -- electronically into like the computer?

Q: Yeah, it goes right into the computer.

FROST: Oh, that's neat.

Q: But when we put them on tape, as we have been doing for a long time, to transfer them to electronic, digital form, it takes real time.

FROST: Uh-huh.

Q: I mean you can do it. We're doing it. But you know, with tapes you can do it at three times the speed and something like that.

FROST: *(phone rings)* Sorry. Whoever it was they thought the better of it, I guess. But those don't take a lot of time, right? Those go right in.

Q: These go right in. Today is the 26th of April, 2010 and with Gregg Frost. Gregg, we left off in 2002, I think. You left Brazil and where?

FROST: Heading to Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Q: OK, let's talk about Buenos Aires -- or Argentina. You went there in 2002, what was the situation there at the time.

FROST: Well, it was a, it was a really interesting and probably historic time for Argentina because the president, de la Rúa, had not finished his term. This happened a few months -- some months before I got there. There was a big economic collapse, crash I guess I should say. And the president ended up resigning and I think that we were on the second temporary successor to the elect -- formerly elected president. And so the country was in a state of financial collapse really. And it was, it was kind of a dire time for the country. And something more related to my own work was that a few months before I had arrived, you know, we had the Visa Waiver Program. Argentina had gone into the Visa Waiver Program, which includes, you know, Japan and most of the EU (European Union) countries and New Zealand and countries like that, rich countries in other words. They had, they had gone into that in the, in the mid to late '90s when they were -- it was kind of boom times and -- for them -- and they were the first Latin American country to be admitted to that program. And of course after 9/11 they were kind of revisiting this stuff because they were more concerned about people staying and so forth. And this corresponded with the economic collapse of the country, which meant that a lot of visa applicants -- people that didn't -- that had entered on the Visa Waiver Program decided it wasn't a good time to go home and they tried to stay in the States. And so there were a lot of overstays and that kind of problem. So they were basically it was, it was the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service), I guess, Homeland -- Department of Homeland Security hadn't yet been created, but they had basically -- the Attorney General, who's, you know, in charge of the INS removed them from the program and there wasn't really a whole lot the State Department could do about it. So all

of a sudden we had a Visa Section that had been severely downsized in the previous decade and all a sudden we had an influx of visa applicants and had completely insufficient space, waiting room space for them or the windows for officers to interview them and it was kind of a trauma for the mission and a trauma for the country in a way because they were no longer a member, in good standing of the "rich countries club" anymore." And so it was a difficult situation. And that's, that's kind of the context that I got there, with a caretaker president and a Consular Section in kind of a stopgap mode, and a front office that somehow blamed Consular Affairs for the position they were in, although it wasn't their idea or their fault and they couldn't have stopped it..

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FROST: The ambassador was James Walsh, who had been an exchange student in, in Córdoba, Argentina many years before, spoke Spanish with a Córdoba Argentine accent, and had, had served there I think as Management Counselor in BA before. He in fact I think took the Foreign Service exam when he was an exchange student there. So he was -- it was kind of interesting how he -- I think he was about ready to retire when they had a political appointee that was in the works, some Iranian businessman, Iranian-American businessman, who somehow got -- was left to languish unconfirmed for a long time and finally there was some alleged ethical concern about him or something. And then he, and then they finally decided to pull the plug on him and withdraw his nomination, so they needed an ambassador and there was kind of a crisis going on. So Jim Walsh was kind of an old Argentine hand, you know, he spent most of his career as a Management Officer. But he was tapped to be the new ambassador and I guess his retirement papers were already in and then he was all a sudden got an ambassadorial nomination. And we can talk more about this a bit later, but I think he kind of turned out to be the right man at the right time for --

Q: Well, it sounds like in the first place a huge management problem.

FROST: Mm-hmm.

Q: I've interviewed him by the way.

FROST: Uh-huh.

Q: He was an exchange student -- this was high school. He was majoring in German and was slated to go to Hamburg or something like that. And all of a sudden they called him up and said, "I'm sorry, the Hamburg Deal has gone through. Will you go to Argentina?"

FROST: That's interesting. I never knew that.

Q: So that's his history. OK, well let's see. You arrived. Talk about your arrival and how you dealt with this mess with the ambassador and all.

FROST: Well, let's see. My deputy and I arrived at the same time. So the top managers in the Consular Section were new. DCM and the ambassador were, you know, had been there for a couple years by then.

Q: Uh-huh.

FROST: And so we were just trying to kind of make it into a more normal Consular Section, which was clearly going to be a long, fairly medium to long term project. But it was, you know, it was quite a management challenge. The waiting room had been -- from back in the days when they required visas it was, it was -- they took the extra space that they didn't need anymore because people didn't need to apply, and turned it into an information resources center, which is the more modern version of the USIA type library.

Q: Uh-huh.

FROST: They had computers and you could come in there and do research and so on and so forth. And that was a nice -- we called it the "Clean Well-Lighted Place."′ Because you could -- the -- what was left of our cramped and crowded waiting room, you could look in there and see people in comfort working at computers and so forth.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Meanwhile, our applicants are sweating like pigs. We took some pictures, my deputy and I, just for fun, of the waiting -- applicants in the waiting room one time. And honest to God, I -- my deputy showed it to me and I said, "This must have been what people looked like in steerage on a ship that was headed for Ellis Island, you know, 1900." A lot of sad-eyed, Eastern European looking, unhappy people. So it was kind of a, it was kind of a miserable, miserable situation. And of course we didn't have enough -- the staff -- the officer staffing, staffing had to be ramped up rather quickly. And the mainstay that really kept -- that kept the embassy alive -- I think it was about six months before my arrival that they went off, that they actually went off the Visa Waiver. So I was up in -- I was up in Brasília sort of feeling like I was watching a train wreck from a distance. And there was a lot of bad blood between State and INS, the Attorney General's Office because this decision, the way it was implemented, and a lot of recriminations and I've -- the ambassador seemed to kind of blame CA (Bureau of Consular Affairs) for all this. And my deputy and I worked for CA, and were sent to BA by Mary Ryan, but had nothing at all to do with what preceded our arrival. We, we were just sent there as the next management team and so that was -- it was, it was kind of -- it was a contentious environment. They had sent -- I guess CA lacked confidence in the previous Consul General so they sent somebody down to "help him," which was kind of awkward because that person was the same level as he was. And yet, help him? You know, if they didn't think he should be there, they should remove him. But they didn't quite do that. So it was just kind of -- it was, it was kind of a contentious, chaotic mess basically.

Q: So what happened?

FROST: Well, we, we did get -- shortly after my deputy and I arrived the new, the new crop of officers that had been -- positions had been created and filled for Vice Consul positions arrived and they were of course -- they were -- most of them were first tour officers. Couple of them might have been second tour--a half-dozen or so. And so we had to integrate them in the flow and make space for them and workspace and so on and so forth. And the mainstays of it, I think I started to say earlier, were -- there were three, three family members who were given sort of emergency Consular powers for, you know, the duration to take care of this influx. And if it hadn't been for them they would have -- the place would have sunk before I got there. But it was -- the sort of difficulty of -- and then they had -- all a sudden they had full-fledged officers that were working beside them, which they hadn't had before, which is good for everyone, but there was a little bit of maybe friction there because they were sort of different category employees in that respect. State came very close to losing the visa function at that point, which would have been an absolute disaster if it'd happened and thank God it didn't. But I think that was one of the prices extracted from Maura Harty who had by then succeeded Mary Ryan as Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs. Mary -- poor Mary had kind of been fired, kind of scapegoated for 9/11, but that's another story. And I think there was a promise, promise extracted maybe that only, only Commissioned Consular Officers would, would make visa decisions from then on. And that was grandfathered for the people that were doing that then. But basically, our family member "paraconsular" officers felt like they'd been disrespected, that there -- they saved the bacon of the place, you know, when all a sudden they had nobody to do all these interviews. The visa waiver went away overnight and they were hired and they worked their butts off and now they were just being thrown out. And they really were, like I say personally, because they were still employed and they were still allowed to adjudicate until their tours led -- their tours ended. But it was, it was kind of -- it was a hurtful thing for them. So that was kind of a point of conflict. The, the ambassador wanted to write -- wanted us to write an dissent cable, because we didn't really went to because we felt the decision had been made and, you know, we had to salute and do it. And but anyway, that was, that was just another part of the conflict. So it was just a tough time. It was, but I think we made steady progress. The thing is that we could not get the front office to take any action to alleviate our severe shortage of waiting room space.. DCM told us to forget it. We could not get them to give us that space back because that's where that library was. And so we were just stuck with this tiny waiting room. And it was only after, after the front office management changed a year later that we were able to -- we found a perfectly good place to move that operation and -- by downsizing the auditorium and moved them there. And then we got space back and re-did the waiting room and that problem was eventually solved. And the officers, new officers came, gained experience, so I mean looking ahead to my departure three years later and that of my deputy around the same time, you know, the place was back to being a fully normally functioning Consular Section, and a pretty darn good one if I do say so myself.

Q: Well, did you find that you spent considerable amount of time sort of handholding? I don't mean this in a pejorative sense, but you know, it was a difficult time and it was descended upon the section rather quickly and all, to make people feel that they were loved and wanted? The officers and the local staff?

FROST: Very much so, yeah. That was, that was -- and my deputy and I both, you know, that was our kind of number one job I would say. And, and that's -- I think management is, is, is -- in many cases is often that. It's not just to checklist, you know, it's, it's, it's engaging with people and so forth in that way.

Q: Well, what was the immigration flow? I mean the people that were coming at this point, what were they like? It was a different breed of cat than it had been before or?

FROST: No, I don't think so. They were still largely, you know, the people were from, largely from the Buenos Aires metropolitan area and metropolitan province, not so much from the hinterlands where really they hadn't had a tradition of immigration before. And they were, they were middle class or trying to remain middle class, I should say, because you there was a lot of unemployment and a lot of people had lost their life savings and so forth. A lot of them were -- a lot of them were trying to see if they could get an investment that would somehow qualify them for some kind of status where they could go to Miami and open an ice cream shop or something like that. And there were legal and semi-legal ways to do that. And so that was kind of a part of our workload too. It didn't strike us that an ice cream shop in Miami really should, should be allowed to open as a U.S. branch office of a family real estate company. Didn't seem to be even the same, you know, field. But we were kind of overruled by the lawyers in the Visa Office on such matters a little bit *(laughs),* you know, who said it was perfectly legal. So that was kind of an interesting -- I mean it was still, you know, in -- while, while they were having a rough time it was still a relatively rich country by hemispheric standards. It was, it was just a country that was very much down on its luck at the time.

Q: Well, I understand that in Argentina from time to time there had been tremendous movements of -- much of the, you might call it the greater leader or whatever it is, all made sure that they had Italian or German or something passports, unlike so many other countries where these were people who had access to other citizenship.

FROST: That's correct. Italian was the heavily predominant citizenship in that equation. The Italian law was you could qualify for an Italian passport if one of your grandparents was Italian. And I guess the kind of difficult part of it is that grandparent could not have been naturalized. If your Italian grandfather had become an Argentine citizen he could not pass his former Italian citizenship on to you. Of course, how do you prove a negative? You could prove that yes, your grandfather was born in Palermo or wherever and was therefore Italian-born and had Italian citizenship. But as to what happened to him when he came to Argentina or went to Brazil or wherever he happened to be, you know, was, you know, another, another thing. And I visited the -- I was really interested in this issue, you know, and I visited the Italian Consulate, talked to -- they had six fulltime passport interviewing officers there. It took six months to get an appointment. I mean the case volume was huge. It was almost like a Visa Section in that sense, you know. And they had -- when, when, when they -- the Italians voted through the consulate and, you know, for their elections, it was the largest polling place outside of Italy, you know, even including places -- other countries in Europe. So it was a -- and of course primarily, you get an Italian passport you, you still can do the visa waiver. Whereas with an Argentine

passport you cannot. So that was the main purpose -- one of the main purpose of those passports were used for international travel, especially to the US.

Q: In fact, wasn't this in a way part of the problem with Argentina? That so many people did not feel fully Argentine?

FROST: Well, I, I don't know whether I'd go so far as to say that. They might have felt that they were sort of better than some other Argentines, but -- and they -- I mean I don't think it was -- I don't think they were less fully Argentine frankly than, than say many, many very dyed-in-the-wool Italian-Americans or Irish-Americans or either hyphenated Americans are fully American.. I mean they were very much, you know, Irish Americans are very much Irish Americans, but they're still American. And I felt the same way about Argentines. You know, they were tied to their country, you know, but they were just using those passports largely as a matter of convenience. And of course it was a status in a way of course to have an Italian passport as well. But no, they were just -- that was just the way the elites were, you know. And of course the Argentines are not well liked throughout the rest of South America, because they -- there seemed to, to think they're better than, better than other people. There's all sorts of jokes about Argentines, you know, such as the Argentine sports announcer who reported that there was a 1-1 draw between Brazil and Argentina…..one "gol" for Brazil, one "golazo" (a spectacular goal) for Argentina. The Argentines aren't very well liked by their fellow South Americans. And of course the Brazilians are perpetually annoyed that so many Americans think that Brazilians speak Spanish and their capital is Buenos Aires. *(laughs)*

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And Argentina is much more known I would say in the world and had been for a long time than Brazil, which is "the country of the future and always will be."

Q: Yeah.

FROST: They used to say.

Q: Well, from way back, from even before, you know, the beginning of the 20th century, Argentine playboys were running around with lots of money.

FROST: Yeah, and polo of course.

Q: Polo and all that sort of stuff. Did you get much of a feel for Argentine politics?

FROST: Well, it was -- of course there's this weird thing called Peronism, you know, and I, I'm not an expert in it or anything, but I mean there's still the Peronist Party and there are various offshoots of Peronism and stuff like that. It's, it's just kind of a weird politics, you know. And there's almost a comic opera aspect to it, you know, some of the, some of the shenanigans and stuff like that. It was kind of fun in a way, but I was, I was kind of

glad that it wasn't part of my job to really have to follow it very much. You know, and I only got interested in it as far as the fun part.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: You know, in talking to my colleagues, I heard some hilarious stories about it and so on and so forth. But it was really -- it was really almost melodramatic in many ways. But of course there was, there was a serious side to it back then because they ended up -- they ended up defaulting on their sovereign debt, which is the first time that had ever happened anywhere pretty much.

Q; Yeah. Well, when you were there were any sort of reflections of the disappearances of the people who during the military dictatorship disappeared? They were the mothers of the --

FROST: Yeah, that was still very -- that was all very much a live issue. And, and it, you know, the embassy was, was in fact involved in, in, in the sort of aftermath, long running aftermath of, of all of this, you know, which we're talking about 20 years on. But still, for example, on the way -- on the main drag, which led to among other places the American school, where all of our kids went, you passed by a building which was called the Naval Mechanical School, which during the Dirty War had been used as a torture chamber. And it's this innocent looking building. There's this whole campus there. All the naval, all the naval stuff is there on that -- in that same area and the naval school's only part of it. But that's a notorious place where they tortured people, you know? The ones they didn't throw them out of airplanes I guess, you know. So the, the thing was that, that made it interesting at that time is there was a question of, you know, of amnesties and, and, you know, there were various laws devoted to provide amnesty. And there was a question of how they were being interpreted and administered and applied and, but, at -- after the, after the temporary president who, who kind of brought some temporary stability for a while. I think I can say there was one who lasted a few days or weeks and then he took over and lasted until such a time when the term ran out of the, of the original elected guy. And then, then there was an election and a fellow named Néstor Kirchner won, and he was kind of a fellow traveler, as it were, of the student radicals back in the day and, and most of his people were. So he just seemed like a regular middle aged Argentine upper class person, but he had kind of this history of being at least sympathetic, if not actually active with, with the guys that were on the left. And so that kind of changed the whole, you know, he for example closed the naval high school and just told the poor naval officers -- naval high school being in that same campusy area where naval mechanical school was as well. You know, the school's closed and we're going to turn it into a museum and you're just going to have to -- Museum of the Dirty War, you know, whatever they called it. And you're just going to have to find other schools for your kids. And that didn't go over well, you know. You know, it was said that he had -- that one, one of these -- I can't remember, there was one woman who was a notorious communist type radical or something. And she supposedly had his private cell phone number. Yet, he'd never had one conversation with the Commander of the Armed Forces during his presidency. You know, and so there was kind of, you know, there was a big -- between

the army, which still played a role in the society, you know, and, and, and the administration, there wasn't a lot of friendliness there.

Q: Did you see any manifestations of the Falkland situation? Las Malvinas, I guess?

FROST: Well again, it was just kind of, you know, -- *las Malvinas son Argentinas!* and so forth and that's the way it was. And it was still kind of -- it was still kind of under the surface, nothing was really -- particular was going on. But of course I'm sure it colored Britain's relations with them to a certain extent, to say the least. But they still -- to a person, you know, thought, thought that they, they should have them back and, you know, and it was kind of a -- but it was kind of more of a, of a political issue that wasn't really going anywhere because there were no negotiations going on. And we had a few Consular incidents related to that, you know, because there were, there were a number of cruise ships that somehow ended up in that area -- there weren't any flights to get there from the Argentine Mainland at the time. I think there might have been one from Chile, I'm not sure, but there, there were -- that was -- and the Falklands, you know, as we still call them, and they were part of London's consular district!

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And it's a heck of a long ways away, you know, so there, there wasn't much tourism there just because of the inaccessibility of the place, except when a -- I think there was some famous explorer who died at sea out there, some American guy, you know, known to National Geographic and stuff. And they offloaded his body in South Georgia and buried him there. And I guess they said he would have loved that, you know, but *(laughs)* they didn't know what the heck to do with him otherwise.

Q: Well, what about American services? Were there a bunch of Americans or people who claimed an American citizenship in Argentina?

FROST: There were -- yeah, there were quite a few Americans, you know, students. It was quite fashionable then because once the -- the economic collapse made the country extremely cheap because the currency was pegged at one-to-one at the dollar prior to the economic collapse, which like I say occurred I think in late 2001, early 2002 before I got there. But when I got there I think it sunk to four-to-one and settled at around three-to-one. So basically, you know, your dollars bought three times as many pesos as they had, you know, a year before. So boy, things were, were cheap. And so -- and housing was cheap, apartments were cheap. And a lot of sort of, you know, Wall Street -- young Wall Street types that had money to burn back then, because that was the heyday of, you know, all the dotcoms and so forth and, you know, the idea was buy an apartment in Buenos Aires and spend the winters, the North American winters in South American summer and have a nice little, nice little apartment in a world class city. So there was a certain amount of that, you know. Not a great -- not, not -- it wasn't really -- you know, there were, there were some interesting cases and so forth, and there were some extraditions which were also fascinating, you know, because I guess if you don't go -- if you don't go to Rio you go to Buenos Aires I suppose. And so, so there was some of that, but not a lot of volume

of it, you know, there weren't any big -- there weren't any big -- there weren't any groups of Americans that were having lots of difficulty and so forth.

Q: How about prisons and things like that? Did you have many Americans in trouble?

FROST: Very few, yeah. And it, it seemed to be -- you know, there were -- unlike, unlike say, Honduras, I mean there was a functioning judicial system and, you know, responsible, you know, child welfare agencies and, and, and, you know, you could -- there were people in the government you could talk to that, you know, looked at these issues the way we did, you know, and could be helpful and so forth, you know. And it was, it was a good government to deal with, you know, as far as the, the foreign ministry and the, our counterparts and so forth.

Q: Was there much in the press or anything as sort of an anti-American attitude or not, or?

FROST: There was some, yeah. There was one paper called, "Página Doce," (Page Twelve), that was just constantly on us for one thing or another. But it wasn't really terribly mean and nasty. You know, you really, you know, they were pretty laid back, you know, as they had been in in Brazil, you know. And I think what was interesting about it in a way that I, I went -- I went to -- I -- I think it was -- it was just a month after I arrived I got invited and attended -- there was some kind of a National Immigrants Day, and they had a facility where it was very much like -- it was literally the Ellis Island of Argentina and Buenos Aires where this was -- you had a big, huge hall like you had at Ellis Island, where they received the immigrants that came in, largely from Italy and also other parts of Europe, Eastern Europe, Poland, et cetera, very -- it was a museum, it wasn't as cool a museum, as nice a museum as Ellis Island was, but it was a museum nonetheless where they had pictures of the old days and stuff like that. And you could tour this. And it was still the headquarters of Argentine Immigration there in this building even then, you know, along with the museum. And so if you want to talk to immigration, that's where you went. And I realized that, that they were so much -- the reasons that they -- one of the reasons they were, if you will, easier to get along with, from my point of view anyway, than the Brazilians was they had -- not that there weren't immigrants from -- in Brazil, but this whole history, this Ellis Island aspect of it, nation of immigrants, you know, really of a piece with our own situation, it made them understand us better and we them. The called Spanish "Castillano", and not "Español" you know, "Castilian". Of course they had a -- they had, you know, a special accent and so forth. And -- but they, they -- there was a commonality that they shared with us, I think. The fact that they didn't have this kind of reflex, knee-jerk, what I call -- referred to earlier in some of these conversations concerning Honduras and then Brazil, which were my previous posts, they didn't have this "negative nationalism," or "low national self esteem, as I also called it, this lack of national self confidence, you know. They might have had some complexes, but everybody does. But they could look at us more as equals, they thought of themselves as equals instead of feeling that they had to be defensive about being Argentine,, if you will. And that's -- I, I remember talking to an older guy at a cocktail party one time. Argentines very tolerant if you tried to speak Spanish and didn't speak it, and they well

they wouldn't make fun of you and they liked it and they would put up with it, you know. And I was remarking this to this gentleman I happened to meet at the cocktail party that one thing I like about Argentines was that, while my Spanish leaves a little bit to be desired, I make the best effort I can and people accept it and he said, "Well, you know, whenever I hear somebody speak bad Castillano it makes me think of my old Italian grandma, because she spoke bad *Castillano,* too.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Well, that's the way everybody is here, and its a very tolerant, laid back, pleasant, pleasant place to live.

Q: How was Chile perceived there?

FROST: Well, let's see. I'm trying to think. There was some kind of a -- I think the main -- they were doing fine, you know, and they were of course doing better than Argentina at the time, that's sort of the economic situation.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And maybe there was a little bit of jealousy, but of course they consider themselves inherently a much bigger and more important country than Chile, you know?

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So but, but they felt a little bit of sting there. And I also think that there were some, there was still some bad blood leftover from the Falklands Malvinas thing because I think that Chileans were accused, rightly or wrongly, I'm not sure to what extent this was true, of, of helping the British, you know, and stabbing the Argentines in the back in some way by giving them intelligence and so forth that they had, you know. And of course Chile -- Chile, even though they had those dark days, you know, which were really I guess far darker than Argentina's in a way when you look at that period of 1970 -- -

Q: Bit of a chapter.

FROST: Yeah, exactly. And they'd recovered from that and they had a functioning liberal democracy and a free market economic situation that was working pretty darn well, you know, much perhaps to Argentina's jealousy. So there was maybe a little minor friction there, but you know, not -- it wasn't a big deal.

Q: How about Brazil? I mean you had to come with sort of a, not necessarily a Brazilian chip on your shoulder, but you know, a feel for Brazil. And how did you find Brazil was perceived in Argentina?

FROST: It was, it was interesting. There has always been kind of a difficult relationship there. And of course, you know, the sheer size of -- the sheer size of Brazil, compared to Argentina, and at least its potential wealth, you know, was something to be envied in a way. And I think that -- I'm trying to recall now, this was when the Free Trade -- FTA, Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, you know, extending sort of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- to the whole hemisphere was still sort of a live issue, it never really happened, but it was -- they were still working on it. And it was funny because -- and I don't know why this was, but, but the -- at one point… I did the usual contact work and I was a buddy of the French Consul and his successor, and the Canadians of course and all the usual suspects as it were. But I've -- because of my previous incarnation in Brazil I became quite friendly with the Brazilian Consul General who was a really good guy, I went to his parties and so forth. And for some odd reason, and it seemed really strange to me, part of his job was to be the lead negotiator for Brazil in the FTA negotiations, even though he was serving as Consul General Buenos Aires. I guess it must have been because of his background or his previous job or some darned thing. But that was an adjunct of his responsibilities. So he'd go off to these negotiations and so forth. It was kind of weird because I wasn't really -- I'm kind of an economic ignoramus, so I wasn't involved in a lot of this stuff. But he was my contact, so, and I was the only one in the embassy who knew him. And he was a key player, you know, it's funny, you know? Spoke Portuguese where nobody else did and, you know, so. But I think that by then none of those negotiations were really going there, everyone was just going through the motions…

Q: Where did the Brazilian immigrants settle in the States? Not Brazilian, I mean --

FROST: Argentine.

Q: Argentine.

FROST: Mainly, mainly Miami. They were -- that's where -- you know, that's kind of the capital. I consider that the de facto capital of Latin America.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And so I'd say largely the Miami area pretty much, yeah. They -- I mean a number of them went -- New York was quite popular and -- as well, but they would go anywhere because they were very adaptable and cosmopolitan, so they'd go where there were jobs or family members. But if there was a concentration it was the Miami area.

Q: Was there much sort of return of people of Italian ancestry going back to Italy or --

FROST: I think there was a little bit, yeah. I'm not -- I'm trying to think of what it -- to what extent I sort of studied up on this when I was there, but there was a, there was a certain morale to that, yeah. But largely they didn't have much -- there was more of probably still more of the, the sort of cultural emotional affinity that they had, you know, with the old country, so to speak.

Q: How was life there?

FROST: Oh, it was great. They've got some of the best meat in the world, if not *the* best meat in the world.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: Argentine steaks. Food is -- lot of good Italian food, of course. And their Malbec red wines are just superb. There's one French wine of any distinction at all the Malbec grape, but it's rather undistinguished. But it's just the right grape for Argentina. So Argentine wines were booming, they were really cheap, you know? And food was really cheap and, and everybody delivered, you know, the ice cream shop, "Freddo's," which is sort of an Italian ice cream place, you know, the equivalent of Baskin Robbins or Ben and Jerry's or whatever. They would deliver ice cream to your house. You just called them up and they'd come over and you'd give them cash. You know, Chinatown was just a few blocks from our apartment. It was a small Chinatown, it was really only just one long, long block, you know, but it was, it was a real Chinatown. And we had our favorite Chinese -- the "Dragon Porteno" where we'd order Chinese food for four, full dinner with rice and egg rolls and so forth, 14 bucks total.. Really, really good steak dinner, ten bucks. So it was just a great place -- and of course there was a nice -- pretty big time for South America anyway-- riding establishment there. We shipped my daughter's two horses there from Brazil eventually. And so we watched horse shows just like we did in Brazil and got to know all the horse people and, and so forth. So we had a very pleasant life there.

Q: Was the Gaucho still there or?

FROST: Well, we never made it down to see them where they really are. So yeah, they were still there though, they were still there. And yeah, because a la -- a gal, an American gal that used to -- that was married to an Argentine vet and worked for some meat company for, you know, inspecting cows or something--they, they later split up. He was an Italian Argentine. She was a blonde lady from Kansas. And anyway, she had -- I looked her up -- found her on Facebook a couple years ago and was married to or living out in the country with a real gaucho who looks right out of central casting. She lives out on a farm in Buenos Aires province somewhere in some corner, you know, because Buenos Aires province is huge and there's a lot of land and agriculture out there in the hinterlands of Buenos Aires province. And it was interesting because if you look at the map you can Uruguay across the Rio de la Plata with Buenos Aires on the other side. That chunk of that sticks out across the river from Uruguay --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And Buenos Aires province alone is about the same size as the country of Uruguay.

Q: Good God.

FROST: Buenos Aires province has 12 million people and Uruguay has 4 million, you know.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So it's kind of funny. The local term for Uruguay among Argentines is "el Paísito," the little country.

Q: Oh.

FROST: *(laughs)*

Q: Was there much in the way of cruise ships and tourism and, you know, down in Antarctica, I mean the whole thing?

FROST: Quite a lot, yeah. We didn't have any, any -- I mean it wasn't really a problem for us or a major focus of activity, unless there was some trouble, you know, somebody died on a ship or --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- somebody got sick. There was one poor guy that I remember we had to -- we had to rescue him from -- at the airport. He'd gotten -- he'd gotten a new passport a number of months before and, and hadn't used it and just threw it in a drawer and then when he at the airport there to go aboard his cruise ship, which I think was headed for Antarctica -- he was, he was an Indian-American doctor from Iowa or something -- and, and they discovered that his passport was -- the pages in it, you know, because it, it was a printing error or assembly error of the passport book, it had the pages all out of order, you know, and it was just all screwed up, you know, the physical book. And so we had to, we, we had to negotiate a deal where -- I mean we, we, we had seen -- we hadn't seen him or his passport, you know, but everything looked fine as far as he was concerned. But you know, it was hard for us to guarantee that we would issue him a new passport, but it was, you know, you know probably a 90 to 99% chance that we would.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: And we had to get him -- let him into the country first before we could do that, you know. And then we got him down to the Consulate and everything was fine and we gave him a new passport and it was free since his old one was the fault of the U.S.

government for messing up. And he was able to get on his ship and -- you know, that was the kind of stuff that we did, you know, and it was -- we, we -- not that we didn't accomplish that in -- stuff like that in Brazil, but it was just always a lot harder. Remember Peter Romero getting, getting put on the first plane out ands stuff like that. That wouldn't have happened in Argentina. There was always, there was always more cooperation in this kind of thing, you know, by and large.

Q: Well then, you were there for how long?

FROST: Three years. I had signed up for four, but I was TC-ed out as an, as an OC (Counselor) in the Senior Foreign Service. And so I -- my four-year assignment became a three-year tour and it was my last one.

Q: Talking about TC-ed out is Time and Class.

FROST: Time and Class, yeah. I, I was -- I had to be promoted -- my window to make the Minister Counselor rank of seven years, you know, was -- it was -- I had to be promoted in the -- by the 2004 boards or I'd be out in September 30th, 2005. So, so that was pretty much it.

Q: So what did you do after you got out? This will take you up to what, 2004?

FROST: 2005. I was told in 2004 that I had to retire by September 30th, 2005.

Q: And what'd you do?

FROST: Well, let's see. I got a -- I actually -- my eldest daughter was graduating from college in Maine in May of 2005 and my other kids' school years were finishing up around then. My second daughter was already in college in Virginia at that time and our son was the last one at home. Our last year in Argentina was his ninth grade freshman year. So you know, my family was pretty much -- when we went back for my daughter's graduation in Maine in May, they weren't come back to BA. And I didn't really want to come back and be a lame duck until the two month job search\ retirement seminar that I had signed up for started on the first of August. So I persuaded HR to let me go early. We came back to Washington. My wife was able to—the timing was perfect for her to get a good job at State in the Family Liaison Office, GS-12 level. So I didn't go back either and I got CA to give me a little temporary job in the Visa Office for a while until August 1st, when I went into the two-month course, retirement seminar job search thing, which took me to my mandatory retirement date of September 30th. So that was -- that, that turned out to be -- my retiring at that particular time is probably the best thing that could possibly happen to my wife as far as that goes. And then we decided to settle in Northern Virginia and Falls Church City is where we were at initially and we rented a house and my son, who'd never been to school in the United States before, did his last two years of high school in -- well, three years of high school, sophomore, junior, and senior -- at George Mason High School in Falls Church City. And so here we were. And so I did, I did WAE work overseas, you know, this one, two, three month temporary consular fill-in

jobs for -- from -- beginning right, a month after I retired I was headed for Lima as a Consular Visa Line Officer, you know, for couple of months. And I did a number of other gigs after that. I did Frankfurt, Brussels, Lagos, where I got to go back and see my old stomping grounds there, Conakry, where I got to go back as my old stomping ground as well, which was fun, to say the least. And let's see. Montreal, Nuevo Laredo, and -- but anyway -- ever since the fall of 2008, so I guess it was three years I did kind of the on the road stuff. But since then I've been working in a, in a domestic WAE job half-time for the Consular Systems Technology Division of Consular Affairs, kind of on the margins of the IT (Information Technology), the, the, the sort of border between the technology and the policy side of consular work. You know, I'm not an IT person, but there has to be kind of a real consular person that understands the business practices and so forth --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- immigration and, and, and, and passport laws and regulations and stuff, which feed into the systems to kind of say well yeah, you can do that technically, but it would be illegal to do it, you know, so don't. That kind of thing.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: So that's keeping me, you know, about as employed as I want to be.

Q: Well, how has your daughter kept up with her horseback?

FROST: Well her horse from Brazil, on which she won the city championships in Brasília in 2001 when she was 14 and was a team silver medalist in the nationals, which was held in Brasília and of course now lives in Pennsylvania, close to her, but she doesn't have time to do much riding any more.

Q: She's a vet, is that --

FROST: She's going to be a vet. She graduates next month from the University of Pennsylvania and she's going to be a horse doctor and go to, go to Kentucky for an internship in Lexington, you know, the horse Mecca of the world, so to speak. Our eldest graduated in Brasília in 2001 and she did Peace Corps in Burkina Faso in West Africa. Before that, while she was waiting for the Peace Corps she got a certificate in ESL (English as a Second Language) teaching and taught ESL to adults in the LADO Institute in D.C. And then she did the Peace Corps, came back from the Peace Corps, and worked as a, as a -- first as a Program Assistant and then was promoted to Program Officer for want -- for a foundation, the Phelps Stokes Fund, that did -- that does program -- International Visitor grantees from the State Department. It's the perfect job for, for --

Q: Oh yes.

FROST: -- a person who grows up as a Foreign Service kid. And my son, of course, is a senior in -- had a great three years of high school here, graduated, did well, you know,

adapted well, went to college at Newport -- Christopher Newport University, graduating with his history major next month, two days after -- two days before my daughter graduates from vet school. And then he's going to, to George Washington to -- for his master's in museum studies next year and going to be interning in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History as a, as a junior editor for their blog this summer. So, so, and you know, graduating -- growing up overseas is a big part of our, our kids lives, you know. And, and it's a good thing, you know.

Q: Well, it sounds like your kids have really put their Foreign Service experience to good use.

FROST: But I don't know -- it doesn't look like any of them -- none of the three are probably going to end up being a vagabond, you know, out of it --

Q: Yeah.

FROST: -- which is fine, you know. I guess we've become East Coast people by default, as it were.

Q: Well, the interesting thing I find is how many people we know -- I was born in Chicago. My wife was born in Missouri. But all of us become either West or East Coasters, you know? The, the, the Midwest -- when I fly over and I look down there, "God, there are really people living there!" you know?

FROST: Yeah. Like I was telling you at the beginning of this, my parents were in Washington during the whole decade of the '40s, even though they were both from Iowa. And then they went back there. But they seem to -- you know, there was -- they had -- they had very cosmopolitan life here and there was a friend of theirs I think who was originally from Omaha, Nebraska -- or maybe it's just his employer was an insurance company from Omaha, Nebraska or something. But he always said his, his rule of thumb was that civilization ends at the Susquehanna. That was the border, western boundary of the "civilized world" for him, you know, and everything else out there is sort of, you know, thar be dragons and stuff.

Q: Yeah, yeah, up there be dragons.

FROST: And while I, you know, I enjoy going out there and I still feel an affinity for, for that part of the country and I've had some great times and experiences there. Major metropolitan areas I could do again, Chicago, St. Louis, you know. But as far as, you know, a town of 25,000 people in southeastern Iowa, you know, I think I -- even though once in a while I'm crazy enough to say, "Gee, maybe that'd be fun," it's sort of like I think it through it's probably not somewhere I would fit in anymore.

Q: Yeah.

FROST: *(laughs)*

Q: OK. Well Greg, thank you very much for this.

FROST: Thank *you*, Stu. It's been truly an honor and a pleasure to have been interviewed by you.

End of interview