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NANCY E. JOHNSON

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INTERVIEW

Q: Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

JOHNSON: I was born right here in Washington, D.C. on June 9, 1941.

Q: Alright.

JOHNSON: I never thought about it as a particularly distinguishing thing except that when I went to get a passport renewed in London, the Consular Officer said to me, "My God. You are the first person I've met in fifteen years as a Consular Officer who was actually born in the District of Columbia."

Q: Let's start on your father's side about the family.

JOHNSON: My father, in fact, died when I was 2. His name was Ernest Johnson and his family were Scandinavians. His father was from the Swedish speaking part of Finland and he met my grandmother on a ship coming over. She was from the Aland Islands (between Sweden and Finland). He was seventeen and she was nine. He waited until she was eighteen to marry her. His younger brother married her younger sister. Ernie Johnson died of cancer of the bladder when I was two.

Q: What was he doing in the states?

JOHNSON: He was an architect. He attended art school in Philadelphia. He and my mother moved down from Philadelphia, they both came from the Philadelphia area, to Washington in 1938 because he got a job with the Department of Justice, the story is designing prisons. They lived not far from here [National Foreign Affairs Training Center] on Wakefield Street in Arlington until 1943 when he died. About a year later, my mother met a widower called Guy Anderson Lee. They married when I was three. For the purposes of this conversation, when I speak of "my father" I'm referring to Ernie Johnson. My friends tell me when I speak of "my dad" it is Guy Lee, because he was the man that raised me from the time I was three.

Q: Let's talk about Mr. Lee. What is his background?

JOHNSON: He was born in Indiana and grew up on a dirt poor farm in a town called Ladoga. He worked his way through Wabash College and then Harvard University, where he got a PhD in History. He came to Washington, D.C. to work at the National Archives. He worked there for a number of years and met my mother. They married in 1944. We lived, as I say, here in Arlington. But then, because my mother was pregnant with what would be the fifth child--he had two children and she had two when they married-- we moved to a big house in Chevy Chase. And that's where I grew up. Dad got a job as a Foreign Service Reserve Officer with the Office of the Historian in HICOG—Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany in Frankfurt and we went to Germany in 1950. We were in Frankfurt for a year and then moved to Bonn when the embassy was established there. Dad was Wristonized into the Foreign Service I think in 1954.

Q: Okay. Well, let's go back just a bit. How did your Dad move from a dirt farm to Harvard?

JOHSON: They were all hard-working. The parents made sure all the kids got to college and they all worked their way through. Dad used to tell stories about when he was a clerk in the men's clothing department of JC Penney's and how the women customers would come and tear open the shirts and how he would have to put them back together again. After graduating from Wabash during the Depression, he asked the richest man in Crawfordsville, Indiana, home of Wabash College, to lend him $5,000 so he could go to graduate school, since there were no jobs. At Harvard he made some good friends. One of them became Headmaster of Northfield School for Girls which I attended when the time came. In the late thirties he taught U.S. history and government at Clark University. I think Dad must have come down to Washington in the forties, after his wife died in childbirth and left him with two small children. During the war, he worked on some kind of war board and then worked at the National Archives. I have forgotten all the details of his career. He was in Who's Who.

Q: What about your mother? Where is she from and what is her background?

JOHNSON: She came from Philadelphia. She quit school at fourteen to go to work.

Q: What were her parents doing?

JOHNSON: Let's see, her parents were Austrian and Romanian. I never met them. I think her father was a street car driver in Philadelphia. He was apparently taken to Canada as a young child. I don't know about her mother. There was bad feeling in the family and apparently some unforgivable things happened, so we didn't have much to do with my mother's family except with her youngest sister, who is still living. There were nine children in that family.

Q: What did your mother do?

JOHNSON: She was working at a construction company and my father called up to order supplies and apparently fell in love with her voice. They met, one thing led to another, and they were married on October 12, 1929, two weeks before the stock market collapsed. After that collapse, they lived with his parents, my grandparents, for a while. When economic conditions improved he got a job with the Philadelphia Department of Education designing schools. Then they moved down to Washington when he got work here. I also think it was important for them to have a place of their own. In 1930, my older sister Carol was born. She married a man called Dwight Cramer, who was also a Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Yes. I think I interviewed Dwight.

JOHNSON: I guess I am the equivalent of the third generation in the family to be a Foreign Service Officer.

Q: When did you move from Washington to Frankfurt?

JOHNSON: 1950. We left on June 27, 1950. I was nine years old.

Q: Let's talk about Chevy Chase and all that. What was Chevy Chase like?

JOHNSON: We lived there from 1946 to 1950. It was idyllic. The neighborhood was full of big old houses with families with lots of kids. The O'Keefes across the street had nine.

Q: Where did you live?

JOHNSON: On Thornapple Street. Going East off Connecticut Avenue, Thornapple Street goes down a hill and then at the bottom of the hill broadens to three lanes. In the fall, we neighborhood kids would pile up the leaves at the bottom of the hill along the curbs and hide in them. When a car came down the hill we would roll out onto the sidewalk, shocking the driver. That was one of our games.

Q: My cousin and I spent a lot of time on Underwood Street.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. That's the next street over.

Q: I know the area very well.

JOHNSON: The Underwood Street hill is much steeper than Thornapple's. We lived on the corner of Thornapple and Dalkeith. It was a wonderful neighborhood, with lots of kids. We played softball in the street.

Q: In the family, what was . . . Your dad was a historian? Was the world very much with you all? Did you sit around the dinner table and talk about things or not?

JOHNSON: We always did. My sister-in-law said when she married my step-brother she had never been in family conversations like ours. She got a reading list from Dad and realized you couldn't join the conversation at Sunday lunch time if you hadn't read the Post that morning. Dad was an extraordinary person because he never forgot anything he read and he brought to the conversation all the depth of his experience. Not pompously, but just in a very gentle and lovely way. I realize when the family gets together now, we don't have the same kind of conversations any more because he isn't there. He was very special. I think I was extremely lucky to have him as a stepfather.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: Do you recall in your youth some books, particularly fun or influential or serious?

JOHNSON: I remember distinctly that the school library had a series of biographies of famous people when they were children. They had orange covers. There must have been twenty or thirty of them. I read them all. Now, I should explain about the family. The Johnsons were Dwight Cramer's wife Carol, who is ten and half years older than I am, and me. Guy Lee had two children, a boy who is six months older than I am called Michael and a daughter who is two and half years older than I am called Laurinda. The three of us in the middle were always "The Three." I shared a room with Laurinda. She liked books like Little House on the Prairie and she loved telling stories. At night she would tell me what she had read. Meanwhile, I would be reading histories and biographies, Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys and that kind of stuff. In a way, I had double reading, but half the books I didn't read myself. And our final sibling is Margaret Lee. I used to tease Peggy about being the only person in the family related to everyone by blood.

Q: That's great. Where did the family fall politically?

JOHNSON: My mother said they voted for Roosevelt. They were Democrats. And, we pretty much all are still Democrats and fairly liberal on most things I think.

Q: Religiously, where?

JOHNSON: Not really religious. My father's family were Swedish Lutherans. In Chevy Chase, the closest church was the Chevy Chase Methodist, so we kids were sent there. My mother's family was Jewish but she had given up that. We were all christened in Germany. We were Protestant.

Q: This wasn't a major factor . .?

JOHNSON: No, it wasn't. In truth, I think we went to church as children so the folks could have a little bit of time to themselves.

Q: Yes. What about a school? You went to school in Chevy Chase?

JOHNSON: Yes, to Rosemary Elementary School. I then went to Leland Junior High when we came back from Germany and BCC for a year before being sent to boarding school. Growing up I could walk to school.

Q: Let's talk about Rosemary. How did you find school?

JOHNSON: In the pecking order, I was number four. School was my salvation. I mean, number one was a pianist, number two was an artist, number three was the boy and there wasn't a lot left for number four. I was the academic one. By instinct and nature I was the academic. I was always pretty good at school. I loved it.

Q: Did you get very much, I am still talking about some of the elementary type, how did you find courses you . . , were there any courses you didn't like?

JOHNSON: No, not that I can recall. I do remember I hadn't done my homework one Monday morning when I was in first or second grade and decided I didn't want to go to school. So I told my mother I had the mumps. They were going around. She made me stay home and called the doctor and by golly I did have mumps and a bad case of them. That taught me an important lesson. The school system didn't have enough teachers, we were kind of a bulge I think. We weren't baby boomer kids, but we were the last before the war. I had the same teacher for kindergarten and first grade. I remember in kindergarten we did double shifts. My mother many years later commented on how much work it was because my brother and I had the afternoon shift of kindergarten. She said it meant double the laundry because we were scruffy in the morning, then we had to be cleaned up, fed lunch and sent off to school in the afternoon and this was repeated every day. The photographs of my classes show the scruffiest bunch of kids you'd ever care to see. There were some very bright, nice kids. Well, it was a lovely neighborhood. I don't recall any serious problems.

Q: In elementary school, was there any teacher or teachers who stuck out as influential?

JOHNSON: There was a woman called Mrs. Pogue. I don't know why I remember the name. I guess she was my teacher for kindergarten and first grade. I don't remember anything in particular from those early days in Rosemary. I remember more from when we got to Germany. But, I wanted to tell you my first memory. Dad worked with a man called Martin Claussen whose son, Paul . .

Q: Paul Claussen . .

JOHNSON: Paul Claussen. We went to Paul Claussen's birthday party. I must have been three, almost four. We went in a car, which we didn't own, so that made it memorable. In the middle of the party, the Claussens' neighbor came and said something and the party broke up. Years later, I asked Dad what happened that day, and he said, "My God. That was the day Roosevelt died." The neighbor had heard the news on the radio and came and told the adults. That's was why the party broke up. Many years later, I came back from England--we'll get to there--and had a job in the Department's Office of the Historian. It began in January but I went to the Office's Christmas party. I was talking to someone and they said, "Oh, you're from Washington. So is Paul Claussen." I went over to Paul Claussen and opened the conversation by saying, "You owe me the second half of a birthday party." He looked at me, laughed and said, "Nancy Johnson you're right. I do." Anyway, I don't remember much about Rosemary Elementary at all. I was with the same kids for a couple of years.

Q: Had you started Leland before you went to Germany or not?

JOHNSON: No. We went to Germany in 1950 so I was age 9. Dad had a job in HICOG, the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany.

Q: Alright. Let's go to Germany. You were in Germany from when to when?

JOHNSON: We went on June 27th 1950. The headlines on newspapers at the dock I remember were in big letters, "WAR IN KOREA." My folks were somewhat concerned about whether the Russians were going to come roaring through Germany and war would begin again. There were evidently detailed evacuation plans. My sister tells me that in case of an invasion, Dad was to stay behind to burn documents in HICOG's headquarters in the IG Farben building while Mom was to drive the five kids to some westward destination. We lived in Germany from 1950 to 1954. We lived in Frankfurt not far from HICOG. My dad had a job at the Office of the Historian writing a history of the occupation as it took place. We lived in Frankfurt for about a year, until early '51 and then moved to Bad Godesberg near Bonn.

Q: So, basically, most of your time in Germany was spent in Bad Godesberg.

JOHNSON: Yes. We were there until '54 and then we came back. Dad either joined the Foreign Service before we left or when we got home.

Q: How did you find being a kid in Bad Godesberg and also Frankfurt?

JOHNSON: Actually, it was very pleasant. In Frankfurt I remember there weren't any trees because the trees on the street had been cut down during the war. We went to a local school. It is interesting, my memory of those years is kind of gray and black and white. We lived in a house next door to a family called Snyder. The house next door was bigger than ours. The houses were semi-detached. The Snyder's house is now a Frauenclinic, clinic for women. The doctor who owns the clinic lives in our house. There was a janitor who took care of the heating, fed the coal into the furnace and whatever, who had Nazi paraphernalia I remember distinctly. The house had a dumbwaiter, which was wonderful fun. We didn't have contact with German kids. We walked to school which was three or four blocks away. It was an American school. I remember we collected cigarette pack cards and had some game of swapping them, but I don't remember details of the game at all. Years later my younger sister Peggy worked in Germany and I would stop and visit her. We went to Frankfurt, to Holtzhausen Strasse where we had lived. The trees have now grown of course. We were standing on the corner looking at the Frauenclinic when a very formidable looking nurse came to the door and stared at us. My sister went up and showed her photographs from 1950. The woman just kind of melted, she was perfectly charming, and she said, "The doctor's away but come some time because I'm sure he'd show you the house." There was a kiosk that sold cigarettes and candy down the street with some juvenile delinquent types always hanging around it. Their sons are still hanging around. Everything of course was much smaller and it was lovely. The school that we'd gone to that I'd thought was gray on gray was in fact mauve and pink. Germany had gotten color by the time I went back forty years later. Now, in Bad Godesberg we had more contact with the German kids. We lived in the American housing project. We were among the first people to live there and they were still building a gas station. There were two great big holes in the ground for the gas tanks with mud piles on either side.

Every afternoon after school, the German kids would be on their pile and we'd be on ours and we'd throw mud balls at each other until it was time to go home.

Q: Did the political situation intrude much? Were you absorbing things? I mean, the Soviet Union was just over the horizon.

JOHNSON: I don't recall that. I think there was a certain amount of tension, but it didn't reach down to the kids. I remember distinctly the riots in 1953 in East Berlin. Those things we knew about. Of course, this was in the days before television and we didn't have a radio. So what you got was . . .

Q: In '53, I remember, I was the GNA in Darmstadt. I remember we were put on alert. I'm not quite sure what we were supposed to do, but . . .

JOHNSON: I don't remember a lot about local politics. I remember little about the government. Adenauer was there but the political campaigns I guess didn't register with me as a kid because I was nine and ten years old.

Q: At home did your dad talk about the situation because we had things at that period of time like the riots in East Germany and also concern about the Soviets coming through the gap and all that?

JOHNSON: No, I think we were kept from those kinds of concerns. I learned how to ride a bike there. We were active in the chapel and I remember doing a Christmas service. The Germans loved to come to the chapel because of it is in a classic American style. I remember watching a film about the coronation of Elizabeth II. I was much taken with things British, always have been I guess. My brother was a boy scout. I was a girl scout. The boy scouts always had much more fun. He did the stamp collecting badge. Of course, everything he did, I did always better, as he admits. I am still a stamp collector. He gave it up. When the folks went to East Germany, they visited a bookstore and my mother asked the person behind the counter about stamps. He or she said, "I'll go and get you some." Only East Germans could buy stamps. He or she got whatever they were selling.

We had, I suppose, pretty normal childhoods. We learned German in school and Dad recalled that we resented it. Once I entered the Foreign Service it was very useful to have it. We children didn't have much to do with the German people. We had a wonderful maid, a farm girl called Gretchen with whom we are still in touch. She was like a member of the family. My parents used to drive her home to her village near Koblenz whenever there were holidays, and the families became close. Americans aren't good with servants, I don't think. Gretchen was a member of the family. She was the German we all knew best and is now in her eighties.

Q: Well, then you went back to Chevy Chase didn't you?

JOHNSON: Yes. Back to Chevy Chase.

Q: And, how long were you there?

JOHNSON: Three years. Then Dad knew it was time for him to be assigned overseas and he wanted us kids in the middle to have American high school diplomas. He figured that he and my mother would be going someplace where there wouldn't be a high school, so my brother was sent to Mount Hermon School for Boys and I went off to Northfield School for Girls. Our sister Laurinda went for only one year to Saint Mary's College on the Eastern shore of Maryland. I had two years at Northfield and that was the making of me, I think. Our oldest sister Carol had gone to Indiana University at age sixteen and graduated and was working in Washington. She married Dwight in '58.

Q: Okay, let's talk about Northfield. Where is it? And, what was tough about it?

JOHNSON: It was a conservative boarding school for girls in Massachusetts in the Connecticut River valley up from Mount Holyoke and Springfield and Greenfield in the most beautiful setting. It is physically quite a special campus in a very small town where this was the only industry. And, Mount Hermon School, the boys' school, was five miles away across the river. The school mostly consisted of red brick buildings of various architectural styles. Both schools were founded by D.L. Moody, the evangelist. The auditorium was the auditorium he built to do his summer camps or crusades. There was a special aura about the campus. I was put it in a dorm called Merrill-Keep as a new junior. I am still in touch with the woman who was my roommate my senior year there. Northfield combined excellent music and high academic standards. It was very challenging. I needed to be away as number four, I needed my own space and place, and Northfield let me do all kinds of things. I worked on yearbooks. I sang in choirs. I got athletic letters and that kind of stuff. I had a lovely time.

Q: You were there from when to when?

JOHNSON: '57 to '59. Class of 1959. I am on a committee now that is organizing our 50th reunion. I was up there last September and when I came back, I started reading the letters I had written my parents. In one of them I comment about meeting a woman from the class of 1911. Of course, it struck me, she was there planning her 50th, which would have been in 1961. While up there recently, I had great fun going around and whenever I would get into conversation with a student, I'd say, "I am what you are going to look like in 48 years."

Q: What was the hope, the ambitions, being a young woman at a very good school, what were you pointed towards in that era?

JOHNSON: I wanted to be a college professor teaching history. That was the main thing. The other thing I thought about doing was joining the Foreign Service. I kind of knew vaguely that's what I wanted to do. I was lucky at Northfield. In those days, there was a dining hall attached to every dormitory and mine was a small dorm. One of the faculty members who ate there, but didn't live there, was the woman called Edith Passmore who was the college counselor. She directed me toward Oberlin. It was the only college I

applied to. Oberlin came and recruited people from Northfield and Mount Hermon Schools and of the seven of us who applied from Northfield, six of us got in. Oberlin knew Edith Passmore wasn't going to give them anybody who couldn't do the work. And so Oberlin was kind of a perfect place for me.

Q: At Northfield, where were the kids from?

JOHNSON: All over. Actually, it is a good question.

Q: I mean not just where they were from but their backgrounds?

JOHNSON: There were the Lawrences and the Adams. It was the first time in my life I was ever aware that my family were newcomers because I was with people whose families have been in this country a long time. My ex roommate Nancy Bissell is DAR on both sides, from a very old family. But there were also others such as the girl whose father was a Congregational minister and whose family was very poor. There was Nancy Bass of Bass Shoes. In short, we had the full range of people from all kinds of social backgrounds. Most of them, I would say, were middle class from the New England area. I came from farther away than most.

Q: Was there a political slant to the school at all? No overly so, but I mean . . .

JOHNSON: It varied with the teachers. Eleanor Davis, the formidable history teacher, who every Monday morning did a news summary, seemed quite conservative. But, then, Miss Freeman and her brother, Mr. Willy Freeman, who were English teachers, were very liberal. So, I think it just . . . A lot of the kids were from Republican families, but there were a few of us Democrats around.

Q: I went to a somewhat similar school called Kent. It is in Connecticut. And, much earlier, I was class of '46. And, families mainly were quite Republican and I came along a red hot Democrat.

JOHNSON: I did discover I had an "I like Ike" button, but I think it was only to spite my older sister who was for Adlai Stevenson. I must say, I have always been interested in politics, always.

Q: I was just thinking, there were no particular political ties or issues particularly at the time. It was still a so called Eisenhower quiet . . .

JOHNSON: Yes. The fun began with Vietnam, I think. Well, we had sputnik. I remember Miss Davis talking about sputnik and the impact of sputnik. The folks went overseas the day I graduated from Northfield. I had worked at Northfield the summer between my junior and senior years. Miss Davis was in charge of the program and made me the student officer. It is funny. All of us who worked during that summer ended up in her senior history class the next year.

Q: Well, you are talking about history. Was there any particular area of history that particularly interested you or was it pretty broad?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was pretty broad. I knew I hadn't found my period or my time. My Dad did American history and wrote a PhD thesis on the importance of the Chicago grain elevators. Ned Meany, who was the headmaster of the school, had done his on the apple growing industry in Washington State. But American history was never something that really grabbed me. It wasn't until later that I found my own field.

Q: Dwight Moody is of course an evangelical of the Sunday school and all of that. At your time, what was the religion at Northfield?

JOHNSON: It was mixed Protestant. We had daily chapel. On Mondays it was assembly when Miss Davis summarized the news and on Wednesdays it was choir practice followed by cookies. And, of course, we had to go to church on Sundays. They used four or five services that ranged from a very simple Congregational service through to a high Anglican service with chants. And there was just a cycle. Every Sunday it would be a different one of the services. The speakers who came were often very distinguished. We had one famous man from Yale.

Q: Coffin?

JOHNSON: Coffin, yes. William Sloane Coffin. He came at least once a year.

Q: He was really inspirational. He sort of found his voice in the Viet Nam time.

JOHNSON: He was brilliant speaker. Now, going back as an alum and talking with classmates, I learned that the Jewish kids went off to synagogue somewhere and the Catholic kids went to a local Catholic Church. But I think that most of them came to the regular service, too, to feel part of the school. Church service was something we all did. You had your assigned seat in chapel all week and I guess on Sundays as well. You sat in your assigned seat. Mine was right under the pulpit about three rows back. I learned how to sleep with my eyes open, which was an art. Chapel was not a bad thing to have done. And the music was lovely. There was a very inspirational choir director.

Q: For music, talk about your musical education and background.

JOHNSON: Going way back, my older sister played the piano. I was raised with Chopin and Beethoven and those things. Her teacher didn't like Mozart so that was a late discovery. I had a few lessons with this teacher and disliked her intensely so didn't pursue the piano much further. When we got to Germany, my older sister gave me a concertina one Christmas. That frustrated me because the notes are different as you pull the thing in and out. The folks put some more money into it and traded the concertina for a little accordion. I got an accordion teacher and studied the accordion for a couple of years. And then at Northfield everybody sang. I tried out for choirs and ended up in the middle level choir, a step above the general class choir. I didn't have the voice to be in

the top choirs. We did a lot of singing of all kinds, with annual Christmas vespers and a Sacred Concert in May. There was lots of singing all the time and, of course, singing in church. It was a very important part of the school and what binds us. I went back for my 45th with my brother and my youngest sister who would have been in the class of '64 and our sister Laurinda who hadn't gone to Northfield. One event one evening during reunions is a hymn sing. What really struck Laurinda was that four or five hundred people of different generations were all singing and singing in harmony. People remembered their parts.

Q: Was there much mixing and mingling with the boys across the river?

JOHNSON: Oh, it was quite formalized. You did not visit a lot. You went to sports, to a football game on a Saturday afternoon, or to the movies on Saturday nights or to a dance. And, every dorm had a party once a year and you invited people from Mount Herman. But it was not the way it is today when the school is truly coed.

Q: While you were there, was Oberlin always in your sights?

JOHNSON: No, actually I think I wanted to go to Wellesley. But, Edith Passmore decided that Oberlin was for me. I had a couple of very good friends and one person in particular Rennie Heyde with whom I was quite close. She was in the year ahead of me and went to Oberlin. I think that Edith Passmore thought that it would be good for me to go there and good for Rennie as well. I was kind of like a younger sister.

Q: Okay, so you went to Oberlin and you were there from what, '59 to . . .?

JOHNSON: Class of '63. I spent my junior year at the University of Edinburgh.

Q: Let's talk about Oberlin in that period. What was it like?

JOHNSON: Well, Oberlin was very liberal.

Q: Yeah, 'was' is not the operative . . .

JOHNSON: It has always been. I guess it was my senior year, I was living in an old dorm. One day we were messing around and there were panels in the wall, so we wondered what they were and removed one. There was a stairway between the walls of the rooms. Because it was a building from before the Civil War era, it is likely that they used the stairs to move runaway slaves around in the building. Oberlin was exciting because there were boys and they were different. And we were in class together. Oberlin required more intellectual effort than Northfield. If you followed the crowd at Oberlin on a Saturday afternoon, you ended up at the library. It was that kind of place.

Q: Reminds me of somebody I am going to interview this afternoon. . . . was talking about going to MIT, this was back some years, and he tried to develop mixers. And, most of

them didn't date and if they did date they had slide rules with them in their holsters which they took with them.

JOHNSON: Well, at Northfield there were very few cross river couples. There were some, but not many. I think most people dated a little bit between Northfield and Mount Hermon. At Oberlin, there weren't that many couples per se either, but there was a lot of going out. It was a dry town. There wasn't an awful lot to do there. A lot of music, of course.

Q: What did you major in?

JOHNSON: I majored in history. I definitely worked hard. I did history and let's see . . I was not a scientist. I knew that. I did physics for non-science majors which was kind of the history of physics actually. I knew that I wanted to go do a junior year abroad, so I went to Edinburgh.

Q: Were you all caught up in the election of 1960? This was Nixon/Kennedy.

JOHNSON: That's a good question. Yes. Oberlin has a mock convention. They decided the year before that the Democrats were going to have more fun in 1960. So it was a Democratic convention and I was on the Massachusetts delegation. We were for Kennedy and he got the nomination. It was a very sophisticated operation, actually. It took the best part of a year. We had posters and all kinds of stuff. Of course we had all watched conventions on television so we knew how we were supposed to behave.

Q: What about the student body? Were there many African Americans or people from elsewhere there?

JOHNSON: Let's see. I wouldn't say many, but there were African Americans. There were a few African Americans at Northfield. There were a few more at Oberlin. I wasn't aware of too many people from other places. I suppose there are many more now. I suppose if you were in French House you would have run across more but I wasn't. Oberlin was a good place for me, but it wasn't perfect. I think the best place I ever studied at was Oxford.

Q: When you went off to Edinburgh, why there?

JOHNSON: There was a tradition of going to Edinburgh and it was easy to work out the details. There had been a number of people there in the years ahead of me. I went and took British History (First Ordinary), Economic History and something called Comparative Constitutions. Everybody had to take British History (First Ordinary). We were in this huge lecture hall for lectures, but were divided into small tutorial groups. Each tutor would come and give lectures on his particular period. Toward the summer we got to the nineteenth century and a man called Geoffrey Best came and started to lecture. And, lights flashed and drums banged and I thought, "This is it. This is my period." From then on I've been a nineteenth century British historian. That was my field.

Q: What particularly grabbed you about that?

JOHNSON: I don't know what it was. Still don't know what it was. But, it just fascinated me. Partly, I suppose, because it was all around me. The buildings, the attitudes everything hadn't changed that much in 1961 . . .

Q: Did you study Scottish nationalism at all?

JOHNSON: I didn't actually study it, but there were some nationalists around. Edinburgh was a funny place because it was where English kids who weren't good enough to get into Oxford and Cambridge went, if they didn't want to go to London. I tell a story about Edinburgh. The year was divided into three terms. I was in this group of seven or eight other people for British History tutorials. Our tutorials were off the main campus. We had a lecture afterwards that we all had to go to. So the first term, I walked back to the main campus on one side of the street and everybody else walked on the other. The second term, half the people walked with me and half the people walked on the other side of the street. Mostly, it was the English who walked on the other side of the street. And the third term, we all walked together.

Q: Well, what was . . . ?

JOHNSON: It took people a while to decide they wanted to bother to be your friend because you were only going to be there a year. My younger sister spent a year at the American University in Beirut and discovered the same kind of thing. The first term is pretty lonely and a lot of people wanted to go home at the end of it. But, if you hung in there, it became a memorably wonderful year.

Q: When you came back from there, I am just trying to think of . . .

JOHNSON: A thought that struck me, and it's true of coming back from Germany and of coming back from Edinburgh. Those experiences put me out of step with my contemporaries. I was an outsider. In those four years in Germany, I had missed four years when all the people I had grown up with had been together. And when I think back on Edinburgh, a lot of my Oberlin friends weren't interested. They weren't even curious about what was going on, about what I had seen or done. I was not offended, but it was just interesting to me. I realized I was out of step. I had other experiences I couldn't share.

Q: My kids had no problem overseas in school, but when they came back they hated it.

JOHNSON: Yes. You know how Foreign Service was in the old days, you could only visit your folks once per tour. Well, in the summer of 1960, I went to Indonesia where Dad was stationed. While there, I wrote a letter back to friends describing what it was like. People later thanked me for the letter but no one was interested really. That was the first time it struck me. And, coming back from Edinburgh, the same thing.

Q: This is one of the defining things in the Foreign Service. You find how little curiosity there is or desire to plumb your experiences.

JOHNSON: True. But, you are also, especially growing up as a teenager, you are also an outsider. That never leaves you.

Q: When you were in your last year at Oberlin, when you came back, what were you up to?

JOHNSON: I was very proud of myself because I convinced the Chairman of the Economics department to give me credit for the economic history course I did at Edinburgh. Oberlin didn't have economic history and I needed to have ten credits for Economics because I already had more for history than I needed for my degree. He and I talked about what I had learned. I was so enthusiastic and so keen that he said, "You know, I'm going to accept them as economic credits." I was looking for a job. I was quite seriously recruited by a school district in upstate New York but decided that I really wanted to continue, to go on and get a PhD. I needed to get a job where I could live at home and save my money and, then, ultimately go to England to study. I always wanted to go to Oxford University and I decided that that was something I would do. So, I got a job at the CIA as a GS7, working in the biographic register. I had a wonderful two years there.

Q: Okay. Let's stop here for just one second. In the first place, all this time what were your mother and dad doing?

JOHNSON: Well, Dad was of course being a Foreign Service Officer. They went to Indonesia in June of 1959 and were there for four years. Dad was in the political section in Jakarta and then the Department wanted him to have executive responsibility, so he was sent to be Counsel in Medan in Sumatra.

Q: I would think that this was a particularly interesting time. First, you had Howard Jones who was a very controversial ambassador, to say the least. And then Marshall Green came there and Sukarno got booted out or edged out, something like that.

JOHNSON: In those days Sukarno was in control. I didn't have much sense of what was going on because Dad was very discreet when talking about what he did in the office. I remember going to a number of interesting dinner parties so he could meet people from Celebes or various other places, but he didn't go into too much detail about what he was doing. In Sumatra, he was the Consul and had an awfully nice man working for him called Don Toussaint. The families became very close. In fact, when Don had a heart attack on an airplane and died, his wife Charmian called her elder daughter first and then my folks. In Sumatra, we went into the interior. We knew there was a civil war going on and we couldn't go some places at night. I don't remember the details of it because we were only there a couple of months and then came back to school.

Q: When you came back to Washington, you were in Washington for two years? This was . . .?

JOHNSON: '63 to '65. I worked at the CIA for a couple of years. I saved my money and lived at home. It was an interesting experience. I got called in for the invasion of the Dominican Republic because I was doing Latin American biographies at the biographic register. The White House needed biographies of Dominicans. So on a Saturday night, a bunch of us got called in and wrote reports. Our boss had been mowing his lawn and drinking beer and was slightly intoxicated. He sat behind his desk and we kept bringing this material to him to approve.

Q: Obviously, I don't want to get too far into the CIA details. But, how did you find working for this as a historical, biographics, uh, as a bureaucracy, how did you find it?

JOHNSON: I was brand new to these things. I got struck in some ways by the male chauvinist piggery of it. That's the way we would put it now. There were fifteen people who needed to be, who should have been, promoted from a GS7 to a nine slot, but there were only nine maybe ten slots. Naturally, all the men were promoted and some of the women, but not all the women. Another woman, who was a very good friend until she died last summer, called Toni Bilotti, and I were hauled into the branch chief's office and he apologized to us because we were first rate performers and had not been, as we should have been, promoted. That was the first time I'd ever come across, head to head, something like that. I was in a way in my own world because I never intended to make a career of the CIA. I was there for the money quite simply and it was the highest paying job I could get.

Q: I was wondering whether you found that your product, my impression is that there are so many layers that when you put something in at the lower level, as you did, it would go through a polishing process and by the time it got to the top it was probably unrecognizable. Did you feel that at all?

JOHNSON: That wasn't the case with a biographic report. You wrote it. It would go to your editor and then to your boss and then to the wider world. That was the fun of it.

Q: Where did you get your information?

JOHNSON: There was a huge file room. A lot of the reporting was based on material from Foreign Service Officers on those biographic reporting forms that . . .

Q: That was a big deal. I don't think they use those today.

JOHNSON: I agree. But those days. . . My first assignment, my first post --I'll tell this story now while I remember it-- was Sri Lanka. I was made responsible for the Maldives and went to visit. After that first trip, I did 25 biographies. I mean, I purposely did them and sent them off in memory of the years I'd spent at the CIA. They were the result of discussions and conversations with various people. In general, the CIA biographic

reporting was not only based on State Department material, but a lot of other stuff was in the files plus newspaper and other material. You could get quite a big file on somebody. Preparing a report was just straight, historical work putting the biography together. It was quite interesting and good fun and they paid me.

I was there for the assassination of John Kennedy. That was interesting that day because I tried to call out and all the lines were dead. I was carpooling with a man who lived near where the folks lived in Chevy Chase. He was Catholic and wept all the way home. It was really a very grim time. But, it was fascinating that the communication lines were cut. There was no way to call out.

Q: Was this on purpose?

JOHNSON: I suppose it was done on purpose, yes.

Q: It might have been that the lines just got tied up, everybody wanting to talk to everybody else.

JOHNSON: It's possible. But, I think that because the CIA was one place where there'd be enough phone lines to . . . I don't know whether it was a policy or not. But, it was just so strange.

Q: After two years, we are up to '65, I guess? What were you looking at?

JOHNSON: How do you mean? I'm not sure I understand the question.

Q: Well, _____?

JOHNSON: Oh, _____? Well, I had applied to Oxford University. Coming back from my junior year in Edinburgh by sea with a friend, we shared a cabin with a woman who had been to Lady Margaret Hall, a College in the University of Oxford, and became friends with her, the three of us young women. On the way back we wrote a mystery incorporating people on the ship. We were, in an extraordinary way, the social center for the lower class of the ship. There was a professor from Indiana University who added at lot. We just had a lot of fun the three of us, sparking things. Because this woman had been to LMH, when it came time to apply to Oxford I mentioned that I had met her. LMH accepted me to do a BA. The first degree that you get from Oxford is a BA which automatically leads five years later to an MA. They said I had to come and do their BA. Then I wanted to stay on and do a PhD. I went to Lady Margaret Hall in October of '65 and I had five of the most amazing years of my life.

Q: Let's talk about the five most amazing years of your life.

JOHNSON: I had never worked as hard in my life as I did in those years. When I first found out that the terms were only eight week long I thought, "This is nothing." Exhausting. I was writing two ten page papers a week, going to lectures as well as to . . . I

can remember one tutor giving a the reading list that was a full foolscap page in small type. I got as much done of it as I could. Then my tutorial partner and I would go to tutorial and we would either read or hand in our essays. You took turns. I remember I was reading that time and the comment was, "But you haven't read Miss Hurnard's article on Clause 34 on Magna Carta," which was down on the very bottom of that long list. They were expecting me to read everything on the reading list. As I say, I have never worked as hard in my life. At the end of the first year, I felt as if someone had taken my brain and gone, "Boing! Boing! Boing!," just expanded it, defined it, sharpened it in all kinds of ways. It was incredibly stimulating. I was one of the dummies. The people all around me were positively brilliant.

Q: What about woman in Oxford at that time?

JOHNSON: They had been there a long time. LMH was the first women's college and it had been giving degrees since the twenties. I used to tease them about it. I went to Oberlin College where women had been getting degrees since 1835. As an American I was lucky because I didn't belong to any class. In my group of contemporaries in my year there was a woman called Pauline who was from a working class family from Leeds. She was made to feel lesser somehow by the middle or upper middle class girls who had gone to places like Cheltenham Ladies College, although she was positively brilliant as is her husband. Both are full professors now. As an American, I didn't belong to any class. Everyone was open to me and that was really nice. I knew people from all social classes and had entrée all over.

Q: But you did feel very much the class system was . . .

JOHNSON: Very conscious of it, yes. I was aware that I was crossing borders and sometimes might not be able to cross them. Of course, there are men at Oxford. I stayed away from my fellow Americans who were Rhodes Scholars and therefore failed to become a friend of Bill's because he was there at the time.

Q: You're talking about Bill Clinton?

JOHNSON: Yes. Bill Clinton was there. We didn't have men tutorial partners. We sometimes got sent to men's colleges for our tutorials because the men's colleges liked to send their undergraduates to the women's colleges because the women teachers were so good. I had tutorials at more than one college. I can't remember all the different places I went out to.

Q: Were you picking up from your British female colleagues that there were limitations by being a woman?

JOHNSON: No, because I was among the women who were going to go on to be the doctors, the professors, teachers, etc. And they were the crème de la crème. We each had a moral tutor, a faculty advisor. Mine was a wonderful woman called Anne Whiteman who had been mentioned in dispatches in World War II. She got a first class degree and

she told the story that she called her mother and said, "Mum, I got a first class degree and I've joined the Air Force." And, her mother's reply was, "But my dear, we've always been Army." Anyway, Anne Whiteman was a wonderful moral tutor. She was a short birdlike lady. LMH was next to the University Parks and from her rooms you could hear cricket bats on balls sometimes in the summer. She was a fine tutor, stimulating and just amazing.

Q: What did you end up concentrating on?

JOHNSON: I stayed away from American History because I felt that I had done it. Everybody had to do parts of the syllabus and then you could pick optional subjects. I did a special subject in diplomatic history. I knew that ultimately I would specialize in British nineteenth century political and diplomatic history. After the two years doing the BA, I started on a PhD. I was telling somebody the other day that in those days my tuition for a PhD was ten pounds a term, which was thirty pounds a year or about $100. I studied with a woman called Agatha Ram and did a thesis on Cabinet and foreign policy making in the 1880s and '90s. I looked at just how the system worked, the mechanics of foreign policy formulation, and how Foreign Secretaries got Cabinet approval for their policies, and if they did or didn't. I was interested in what it felt like to be on the receiving end of a message. A cable from Africa took six weeks to come by ship to Lisbon and then was sent as a cable. There was a real art to formulating instructions for a diplomat who couldn't get in touch with you instantaneously.

Q: When you are doing British diplomatic history in the nineteenth century, you are really looking at cables, dispatches, memoirs?

JOHNSON: Yes, and letters and diaries. There are several diaries in that period. One of them was a two volume life and letters that a son had produced. It didn't really cover what was in the full diary. After I finished my thesis, I ended up staying on in England. I got a research fellowship at Reading University, after working for a couple of years first in London.

Q: Doing what?

JOHNSON: Doing research for a man called FWD Deacon, Bill Deacon who was the first head of St. Antony's College, Oxford. After twenty-five years as head, he retired. He thought it was time to go. He had an extremely distinguished war record. He had helped Winston Churchill write his History of the English Speaking Peoples. Bill was a brilliant historian. He was given a Leverhulme grant to hire a research assistant so he could write a couple of books. I became his research assistant. I lived in London, shared a flat with some friends and did research at the Public Record Office for Bill. In my spare time, I started working on a diary of a man called Gaythorne Hardy, who was a nineteenth century politician. I had come across the diary while doing my thesis and I knew there was an awful lot in there. I would borrow fifty pounds from my flatmate who had money and I didn't. I would pay her back two quid a week. The Public Record Office in Ipswich, where the diaries are located, would Xerox fifty pounds worth (about two volumes) for

me and send them to me. Then I typed them out. Boy, a computer would have made life so much easier. I typed them word for word. The next door neighbors used to say they heard the tap, tap, tapping of me typing away on these diaries. Then I did a first cut and got a professional to type that. I cut even more and it became a book that was published in 1981.

Q: Did you have any feel for British politics during this period?

JOHNSON: I watched it go on around me. Harold Wilson. Edward Heath. The memorable 1973 miners' strikes caused electricity to go on and off. I followed politics as an interested observer. I lived in England from '65 to '78. It was a wonderful time, no doubt about it. I have fabulous English friends. The English are funny because it takes them a while to decide they are going to like you. Once they do, it's the shirt off their backs and it's for life. I was adopted as the fourth sister of an English family and am an aunt to their kids. I discovered opera there and since 1974 I've been a keen opera goer.

Q: Did you see during the time you were there a change in the class operations as far as people working or was it pretty steady?

JOHNSON: I think that there has always been a certain fluidity. I was there for the sixties, the Beatles. People like Pauline, the woman from Leeds, did very well in ways that she might not have been able to do earlier. She and her husband are both, now at the point of retirement, distinguished historians. She is a medievalist and he does modern intellectual history. They've both done very well. I'm not sure fifty years ago it would have been possible for them to do as well. But Britain was changing. There were more immigrants coming in, from different places, not just from Europe.

Q: Did you get any feel in your particular crowd, the university intellectual crowd as to attitudes towards the United States during this period?

JOHNSON: I remember having long discussions with people when I first went about whether the Warren Commission was rigged. There was a suspicion of the United States. People didn't like the United States. They were prepared to like Americans. While they liked the concept of the United States, they didn't like some of our policies and actions. I think there was a lot of resentment that we were happy and wealthy and they had paid a big price for World War II.

Q: What about the race situation there? Did you see much change there?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't. I didn't have a lot of experience with it. I was thinking about the anti-American sentiments. When the British started to travel more and take holidays abroad, a lot more people came to this country and came to know it much better. But I can remember that people trying to be nice would not ask, "Are you an American?" but rather "Are you Canadian?" That was a compliment as opposed to, "Are you an American?" which wasn't.

Q: How about the Vietnam War? Did you . . .?

JOHNSON: I missed the anger of that because I was away for all of it. I knew it was ugly here. It wasn't so much there. The Watergate hearings I followed. They were covered quite carefully in the press in Britain. Regarding Vietnam, I knew there was something going on here and I was missing it. There, the antagonism wasn't the way it was here.

Q: When did you get your PhD?

JOHNSON: It would have been, let me think, 1971.

Q: What did this mean in the British context the PhD?

JOHNSON: One of my difficulties was I had decided I wanted to be a history professor there. I had all kinds of things going against me because I was foreign and female. The British system was such that you were paid according to your experience and age. To hire me then at 35 was much more expensive than to hire a Brit at, say, 25. Whatever other reasons, there was things going against me and there weren't a lot of jobs then either. So I kept applying for jobs and, meanwhile, did other people's research. For two years I worked for Bill Deacon and then I got a research fellowship at Reading University for three years to work on the diary. I did some teaching there, too.

Q: Where is Reading University?

JOHNSON: Reading is halfway between London and Oxford. It was one of the original "red brick" universities, one of the newer universities. Because it was one of the original red bricks, it became more acceptable than some of the really new universities in the social scale of things. It had always been very strong in things like agriculture. I actually talked myself into the fellowship. It was open to post-doctoral researchers in all fields. I was invited for an interview and I took Xerox pages of the diary with me. When they started to ask me questions about the diary, I said, "I might as well make this show and tell." And, I pulled the pages and let the committee look at them. A mathematician who was on the committee told me later, "It was riveting. I never would have understood what you were doing until you put those pages in front of me." The mathematician and others on the mixed faculty committee gave me a three year fellowship which was wonderful.

Q: How did you fit in sort of a British scheme of things . . . Were you part of what is known as the 'chattering class' the sort of intellectuals? Do they play much of a role?

JOHNSON: I think they probably do. I was not really a part of them. The chattering classes are the people with money and power. After Reading I got a job writing the memoirs of a man called Howard Mitchell. I realized then that I was going to be facing a series of one year jobs with no real future in England doing what I wanted to do. It was time to come home. Meanwhile, my parents at a dinner party ran into Bill Slaney who was at the Office of the Historian in the Department. HO was looking for people to come on contract to do volumes of The Foreign Relations of the United States because they

were way behind producing them. I was hired on contract for a year to do U.S. and U.K. relations in the period 1955-57.

Q: So, this was when?

JOHNSON: The autumn of 1978 I came home.

Q: How did you find the Office of the Historian and Bill Slaney?

JOHNSON: It was not a happy office. I loved the people in it. There were a bunch of us contractors in one large room known as the bull pen and we had a super time. I am so grateful to those people because it was such a difficult year for me coming home. The English dreams and aspirations had ended and my book was still a work in progress that didn't come out until '81. It was just a hard time for me but I was with a very congenial group, really nice people. Why was it unhappy? For example, Slaney offered each one of us contractors a permanent job. It was the same permanent job. The Office of the Historian was inspected that year. We were on what turned out to be illegal contracts. And what's more, we were required to perform at least twice the speed of the regular employees. It was a badly run program. But the people, my colleagues, were wonderful.

Q: I was _____ to the Historian's Office in '84/'85, but Bill Slaney really was _____ at the office.

JOHNSON: It wasn't a happy office.

Q: I mean he just didn't, whatever the skills were, I couldn't complain because I had no problem, but the people around me just had never been in such a place. And here were these brilliant people . . .

JOHNSON: You know, there weren't a lot of jobs for historians out there, so they were really lucky to be there. All of us wanted to have careers as historians, that was an ideal thing. I did the work and was very grateful because it got me over the hump. And then when the year ran out, Paul Claussen's wife at EPA gave me a job.

Q: EPA?

JOHNSON: The Environmental Protection Agency. She directed a branch that included a public affairs office. I got a job doing public affairs for EPA which I did then for a couple of years.

Q: What does this mean?

JOHNSON: I was in the Office of Solid Waste and would send out brochures, answer questions from the public, do press guidance, write little brochures and things like that. It was really being a point of contact. If you called up from some town in Iowa and wanted

to have EPA's information on waste management, ours was the office that put the packet together and sent it to you.

Q: Who was the head of the EPA?

JOHNSON: Oh gosh, I don't remember. That was way above of me.

Q: Talking about solid waste, solid waste sounds kind of good, to have something called 'sloppy waste' or something like that's. . .

JOHNSON: I know. Solid waste is exactly what you think it is. It was interesting to be in a non foreign affairs part of the government, in a much more typical part of the U.S. government. I was marking time. By that stage, I realized I wanted to join the Foreign Service. It was always something I wanted to do. During the Carter years they changed the rules. At one stage, the oldest you could be to join was 31. When that cap went, I had applied in '76 to join, took the entrance exam, passed it and the oral, and was put on the list. I was in London at the time. I was interviewed by an interesting guy in London who was an admin officer who made his millions producing paint in Cleveland, Ohio, and joined the Foreign Service at age 55. My name was on the list as a political officer, but they didn't take me. They took all men.

Q: Do recall the oral exam questions?

JOHNSON: I don't recall the questions. I do recall I was interviewed by three men who had all been admin officers and disliked me because I was their worst nightmare, a smart, over-educated female. But then in '80/'81 when I applied again I came in mid-level. I was interviewed in 1981 by three former ambassadors. It was a completely different ball game. I can't remember questions from the '76 interview. I do remember from later, though. The first question they asked me was about Northfield. And, I said to them, "You asked me that question to make me relax, to see if I could talk, didn't you?" One of them had a granddaughter at Northfield. But, we went on. It was highly entertaining. The book had just been published. I hadn't touched earth for several weeks, I was flying high and enjoying life hugely. When they gave me a series of hypothetical situations, I'd say, "I'm sure there is something in the FAM about that." They'd say, "Oh, no." The questions were things like "What would you do if there was an American in jail accused of dealing drugs?" I did the best I could with the answers.

Q: During EPA, did you find that, now let's see this was during the Reagan administration?

JOHNSON: I can't remember. '79/'80.

Q: Did you find that you were trying to put a good face on a lousy program or did you have any feeling of that nature?

JOHNSON: I thought the solid waste program was very good. EPA had a lot of really interesting material about recycling programs. It had sponsored clean-up programs such as the one at Love Canal. Certain towns had done programs that were very successful and so EPA was trying to share the information they had acquired in these towns with other places about how to go about recycling or various aspects of solid waste management which I thought was very useful.

Q: So you were basically with the program. You weren't just an 'apparatchik?"

JOHNSON: Yes. I thought it was a good thing to be in and doing. It wasn't my field. It was not something I was deeply interested in.

Q: Did you feel there was any future there or was this just a job?

JOHNSON: It's a good question. I think probably it was just a job because I was marking time again. It wasn't my line of work. I guess I could have stayed there and worked my way up the ranks, but I wanted to have subject matter that mattered to me.

Q: You got this prestigious degree, a PhD from Oxford and I would have thought you could parlay that into something in the academic world.

JOHNSON: By the time I got back to this country there weren't many jobs to be had. There were very few jobs for historians. I didn't have any connections. What happens so often is that a professor in University X pushes one of his graduate students at University Y and takes a graduate student from University Y in return. I couldn't play that game. Having done all my graduate work overseas, I was an odd man out. I was interviewed a number of places, but it just didn't work out. It dawned on me, if the gods had wanted me to be a university professor, it would have happened. It was not in the cards.

Q: This was a thought I had about PhD program, it takes bright young people and grinds them down and so in some ways it takes them out of circulation during their most productive years. You know, young people with all sorts of ideas and all that. It is sort of good drilling, but it maybe ends up coming out a sort of homogenous product?

JOHNSON: I'm not sure about that. I think if you are in sciences, I have a number of cronies who are in sciences, they did basic hard core research that has led to other things, either discoveries or . . . One did a thesis on what happens to laser beams when they pass through various liquids. That has led to various industrial applications. For historians it is just getting more experience than anything else. To know sources, to get familiar with libraries, to do the writing, to think big term rather than just small term. And, the Oxford PhD system was wonderful because you got a topic, you got an advisor and you went off and did it. You didn't have to take courses. It was just three years of pure research. I would go off to London and read in the Public Record Office and go to the Institute of Historical Research at London University and read original copies of The Times newspaper. Then I was working on the diary from Reading. That fellowship was really helpful. In the end I knew my way around the British archives, what was there, where

things were, what the papers were, what the limitations were. It was wonderful. So if I'd gone to teach . . . I think the gods probably saved me because I don't know how many years I'd want to have gone on assigning the same or comparable essay topics to generation after generation of freshman doing the basic course. One of my favorite essay topics was about the 1832 reform bill, "Were the hopes of the Whigs or the fears of the Tories more justified?" You know, reading answers to that year after year would not have been as much fun as in the Foreign Service.

Q: After two years EPA, you were getting restless?

JOHNSON: I was finally accepted into the Foreign Service. I was on the list and knew that if they were going to take . . . I should say the last year at EPA they didn't really have a job for me. They had hired me and I was in an office that was eventually abolished. I didn't do an awful lot. Eventually I got on the Foreign Service list. My brother-in-law Dwight Cramer had been on the Board of Examiners. He just asked where I was on the list and was told that I was the number one on the female, mid-level political officer list. If they were ever going to take a mid-level female political officer, it was going to be me. When my time at EPA ran out, I went on the dole for six months. One day in June of '82 I got a call asking me if I would join the Foreign Service and I immediately said, "Yes." The man who called was amused that I didn't even stop to think about the answer. I came in August of '82 in what I call the EEO class. We had eight women, five minorities. It was the last class of the fiscal year and they were going to meet all the requirements.

Q: Were you coming in as a mid-career?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: So this was kind of the mustang program because 'mustang' would be somebody who had already been in the foreign service.

JOHNSON: Yes. This was like being Wristonized. There was a shortage of mid-level women and minorities. The Department went ahead and hired a group of us. Joan Clark told me afterwards, that's another story we'll get into later, that the women were highly qualified and had done very well. I was sitting on a bus coming over to SA15 for orientation, because I lived on 21st Street and E and could ride the bus over, . . .

Q: SA15 would be?

JOHNSON: It is in Rosslyn. It was the headquarters for FSI in those days. I can't remember the street name.

Q: It's was a tall building.

JOHNSON: A tall building right near . . .

Q: It was in Rosslyn, Virginia.

JOHNSON: Yes. And, there was a man who rode the bus every day who was on the Board of Examiners. We got to talking and he made it very clear to me that he didn't think much of the mid-level program. I thought, "Pooh on you." One day I was sitting behind him and a friend joined him and they got to talking about how they got in the Foreign Service. This guy admitted that he'd failed the exam three or four times but the father of his girlfriend knew the Undersecretary for Management and that's how he got in. And I thought, "You sod! (I'm cleaning up my language for the tape.) You looked down on me with all my academic expertise and years around the Foreign Service and you joined on the coattails of your girlfriend's father." I learned later that there was a lot of resentment among white males at this mid-level program, still to this day, because they felt it really hurt their chances of promotion, it moved the goal posts.

Q: Well, I mean, you know everyone's keeping their finger on the number. But you came in in eighty?

JOHNSON: '82, August of '82.

Q: How did you find the A100 course?

JOHNSON: It was good fun. We were a small group and it was a really nice group. We ranged in age from a woman aged 51, Edmee Pastore, to a lad who was 22, with all kinds of colors and ages in between. It was a nice group. It didn't get cliquish at all. It remained a group and we had a lot of fun. Periodically over the years I have run into old classmates and for our 25th we had a luncheon. Fifteen of us who were still in the service and in Washington got together. And a couple of members are still close friends to this day.

Q: What sort of things were you exposed to because you were an older group for the most part?

JOHNSON: We got the full standard orientation course. We had lectures on dressing for success, on how to do things in the Foreign Service, how to write cables, etc. We went off to Hilltop House in Harper's Ferry for an off-site. The Department treated us mid-levels differently only when it came to assignments. The junior officers were given a list of possible countries, and each got to rate them from eight (most desirable) to zero. Someone did the figures and posted them. Only one post got zeros all the way across and that was Matamoros, Mexico. Nobody wanted to go to Matamoros, even as their eighth choice. One guy was assigned there and it turned out to be a perfect assignment for him because he was an econ officer and he got to drink beer, which he liked doing, and talk to Mexican businessmen, which he also liked doing.

Q: Where were you pointing toward?

JOHNSON: I was pointed toward NEA. The other mid-level female political officer in our class and I went to see a man called Eric Boswell who was in NEA assignments. She

got there before me and went in and talked with him. When she left, I walked into his office and opened the conversation by saying, "I have been waiting to meet you all my life." He replied, "Oh God, another Johnson." And I said, "Worse. Dr. Johnson." He laughed. What I like about the Foreign Service is it's an outfit where everybody laughs at that joke. Eric asked me whether I would like to go to Sri Lanka and I said, "How would you like my eye teeth?" It was just a done deal.

There was a new position in Colombo. I've forgotten the name of it. The Department had allocated special money to beef up political sections in various places around the world. I went out to Sri Lanka to do this particular job that included being the labor reporting officer. I was thinking this morning, "Here was I, brand new to the Foreign Service and to what you actually do in the office and I was sent out to do a job that didn't exist before." It was a real challenge. I was supposed to go in the autumn. The man who would have been my boss was declared persona non grata. Then the Sri Lankans decided to hold a presidential election. The Embassy said it couldn't handle somebody brand new at that point and asked me to stay in Washington for a few weeks. I did German. I knew I had to get off language probation. Before I entered the Service, in the six months when I was kicking my heels on the dole, I was getting my German into shape. I had received a letter that said I had to have a language to get off probation. When I joined I had a language test. The letter said I needed to have idioms . . . [End of Tape 1] In my German exam, they asked me, "Wo sind sie geboren?" "Where were you born?" I replied with one of idioms I had learned from an old grammar book, "Meine Wiege stand in Washington" which means "my cradle stood in Washington." There was a roar of laughter from the examiners, who later told that that they hadn't heard anyone use that expression since their grandmothers. They gave me a 2/2 or 2/2+. In the time before I went to Sri Lanka, I did German and got off language probation. The teachers told me then that they had dined out on the story of the woman with the old-fashioned idioms.

Q: Like the famous one of somebody learning English and was learning, "Zounds! My posterior has been struck by lightening."

JOHNSON: Exactly! That kind of thing. I went to Sri Lanka in January of '83.

Q: You were in Sri Lanka from when to when?

JOHNSON: January of '83 to June of '85. Six months after I arrived that which hits the fan, hit the fan. There was serious rioting between Tamils and Sinhalese. At the time an English friend was visiting. Things were pretty ugly. I was at the office and she was walking down the street where I lived and someone stopped her and said, "Where are you going? There is trouble up ahead. You better go back and go home." She went back to the house. We were not in any danger, but could smell smoke from fires. In various parts of the town people were rioting and people were killed.

Q: Let's talk about when you got there in '83. Who was the ambassador and what was the situation?

JOHNSON: The ambassador was John Hathaway Reed, who had been governor of Maine.

Q: He'd been there twice, hadn't he?

JOHNSON: No, there were two John Reeds. John Verner Reed was Ambassador in Morocco. John Hathaway Reed was a very amiable, very nice fellow. The situation was tense, but nothing on the surface.

Q: Up to that point, had there been much in the way of riots and that sort of thing?

JOHNSON: Not in recent years. I think communal tension was a persistent problem and it had really got started by Mr. Bandaranaike when he brought in the Sinhala only legislation that made Sinhala the official language of the country. Until that point, English had been the lingua franca and everybody spoke English so it didn't matter if you were Sinhalese or Tamil or whatever because you all used English to talk with one another. The Sinhala only policy created segregation. I can remember at the time in '83 someone telling me, "I ran into a man I'd been to school with and had not seen since because he was Sinhalese, I am Tamil. We were in different worlds." It got me thinking long term about this whole issue of using multiple languages in a society. How difficult and divisive that can be.

Q: What was your job?

JOHNSON: I was the junior political officer and the labor reporting officer. The DCM was an old NEA hand, South Asia hand called Herb Haggerty. In order to give me some responsibility, he said, "You are now the Maldives officer. Be it ever so humble, it is yours." I got to go three times a year out to the Maldives. We had at that time a consular agent, a woman called Rashida Didi, a wonderful woman. I would go and stay on Male, the capital, and Rashida would set up appointments for me and introduce me to people. I would talk with her about people and events. Every time I went, we had a tea party and invited ten women. We sat in the hotel garden and they talked. They were all friends, had all known each other for years. Most of them had studied in Australia or elsewhere. They gave me a real sense of what it was like to be an educated woman in the Maldives, to live there and the kinds of things they did. I'll never forget the first time, I was standing on the steps with Rashida saying goodbye. It's a wonderful place, but it's hot. It is right on the equator and I got very tan. We were standing there, side by side and someone said, "Look, your arms are the same color." That really struck them that Caucasians could get dark.

Q: What was the situation on Maldives?

JOHNSON: Gayoom was President. It was quite quiet. We were trying to show interest. I went the first time because the U.S. Navy had sent in a couple of ships on a visit and I got to brief the ships about what they were dealing with. It is a Muslim country and it's very conservative. I had to say things like, "Don't pee off the dock," and "Girls are going to be

hard to come by and drink is going to be hard to come by, so forget about that. But if you want to swim and play volleyball and relax and do something really different, then this is your place. So enjoy it because these are little paradises these islands." The visit turned out to be a great success. I called on various people in the government and on my diplomatic colleagues. The Indian of course was typically Indian and very aggressive about our ships visiting. When I pointed out that Indian ships had visited the week before, he backed off right away. The first visit I stayed on the island closest to Male called Villingili, a boat ride from Male. Later I always stayed on Male and that made me unusual because most people didn't. I was there once when Yasser Arafat came to visit. Every foreigner was asked to leave Male except me. They didn't tell me why, but just asked me to move to a different hotel and stay out of sight. Later I learned Arafat visited. I guess they let me stay on Male because they knew that I was a friend. I have photographs of 'Welcome to Arafat' posters from that time in Male.

Q: Did we have any interest in the Maldives as a place to put ships?

JOHNSON: Not to put ships in. It was not the sailors' favorite kind of port because there weren't women available or alcoholic beverages. It was, however, a nice place for a break. I think we used it a few times.

Q: Also, I would think in a place like that you would sort of want the Navy to come in a take a look around because one can't help but feel a typhoon or a tsunami or some sort of disaster might hit and you'd have to bring a ship in.

JOHNSON: Global warming means the Maldives will probably disappear. I think it is the country with the lowest high point in the world. Like six feet. I don't know how often the Navy uses it. I suppose if you are making the trek from Diego Garcia to Singapore or somewhere you could stop there. They usually prefer a bigger place, such as Madras or . . .

Q: Was the Bandaranaike /Sinhalese situation still intact?

JOHNSON: Well, the Bandaranaike's were no longer in power. The President was a man called J.R. Jayewardene, a very pleasant fellow. I can't remember what prompted the troubles that began in June/July of '83, but they were very ugly. They have not stopped since. It was the forerunner of all the troubles that still go on. They were burning parts of town. Embassy people were sheltering the families of their Tamil cooks. People came into the Embassy off the street to talk with me about what was going on. One man had just seen soldiers killing someone and was just appalled. He had been in the Sri Lankan army. He was Tamil. Sri Lanka has been a one issue country ever since. But it is also paradise. It is a perfectly beautiful island. Wonderful ruins of ancient pagodas and other antiquities. My houseboy planted a papaya seed in the garden and six months later I was eating papayas. It was a lovely place to begin because like any small embassy, you got in on all kinds of things. There was an NEA Chiefs of Mission Conference and I got to be Assistant Secretary Dick Murphy's note taker. That was the first time I had ever been on television and it became very useful. I spent a lot of time with Dick Murphy taking notes

during his calls. He has a very quiet voice and so does President Jayewardene. I said to Murphy afterwards, "Sir, there were bits in that conversation I didn't get because I couldn't hear because there was somebody was using a chain saw outside." And he said, "It's happened to me too. Just wing it." It was a very pleasant place. I was the junior political officer and a woman called Karen Stewart was the junior econ officer. Although younger than I, she had more Foreign Service experience. There was a group of 12 single women, secretaries, communicators, Karen and others. We did things as a big group or in smaller groups. We would take trips around the island as a group. It was very nice to have that company.

Q: Did the United States have any particular interest in the area, in the country?

JOHNSON: In the country itself, I can't remember. I don't think so. We wanted it to be peaceful and not fighting with India. It was a friendly country, benign. Don Toussaint had been the ambassador there before Reed and was held in high regard. It would have been very awkward if Sri Lanka had been anti-U.S. I think.

Q: _____ The _____ is basically designed to beat up on the United States.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. And the Sri Lankans at this stage weren't hostile in that sense. I was looking at it on the map. It has the most wonderful sea coasts and parks. I saw leopards and all kinds of things. It was there I learned that in the Foreign Service you work Saturdays, Saturday morning anyway. You appear when invited to something at the Ambassador's residence five minutes before the event begins and work the occasion. In big events you become either a pusher or a puller, that is, help move people along. I remember going to the Reeds' house, early as usual, and finding them sitting there silently waiting for somebody to come. They were a very nice couple.

Q: Did you have any problem dealing with the Sri Lankans? Were you able to do your business easily?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, very easily and with all kinds of people. When Don Toussaint was Ambassador, his wife who had been British, knew well Lalith Athulathmudali who was the Defense Minister. He had been the first non-Brit to be president of the Oxford Union Society and he was a very keen Oxonian. I thought it would be very sensible to put me next to him somewhere just because it would have been a really good contact. John Reed didn't want anybody to have contacts with ministers except him. When I finally met Lalith, he said, "Where the hell have they been keeping you?" He had breakfast once a week with a cousin who worked in the cultural section of the Embassy. She would have been happy to invite me to join them for breakfast occasionally. That would have been the way in to have a really interesting tie you wouldn't normally get. My not being able to meet Lalith was one of my first realizations that the Foreign Service could be a stodgy outfit and I had to obey orders. I mean I could not go behind the ambassador's back.

Q: Course not.

JOHNSON: And it's really too bad, a missed opportunity.

Q: I know he recently died, _____, went to Oxford in the thirties and was a classmate of Ted Heath's and Harold Wilson and he played that for years very professionally as a minister in London.

JOHNSON: Lalith was eventually assassinated, but he was a good friend of Don Toussaint's wife. The double connection—personal and Oxford-- would have given us lots to talk about. Had I been ambassador, I would have put me there right away and said, "Get moving and don't come back until you have breakfast with him once a week." But it wasn't for me to decide. Years later after I left, one of those teams went out to Colombo to conduct an emergency drill. I can't remember what we called them. They pretended there was some big crisis and, they told me later gleefully, Ambassador Reed was sent off to the Foreign Ministry and left there. The Embassy just carried on. Not physically, but the Embassy just played the game without him and functioned very well, thank you very much. They forgot about him.

Q: Who was DCM?

JOHNSON: It was Herb Haggerty, a real pro. There was a minister who had an autistic child. USIS sent Colombo a film about autism. Herb had invited the minister over to see that film privately and he got into trouble with Reed for doing that. The film was only going to be available for a week and the Ambassador was on leave at the time, so Herb met with the Minister. Sri Lanka was fun because I got to travel all over the island. There were problems in the North with the Tamil Tigers, so I never got up to the far north. But I did get over to the east coast and to the south. A lot of friends came and stayed with me and we toured around.

Q: Did you get any feel for the role of India during the time you were there?

JOHNSON: Yes. India was the nine hundred pound gorilla in the room. I should say I started to learn Sinhala. I was one of the few people at the embassy actually doing it. I learned to read and write it because I had made a promise to myself that wherever I went, I would learn the language. I am not a linguist, but I would work at it. Eventually, within a couple of years, India had sent in troops. India was always playing with Sri Lanka and always there.

Q: I would assume that at this time our relations with the Indian Embassy were correct, but not very close.

JOHNSON: I really can't remember. I think probably that would be accurate.

Q: It would strike me, this was not a time of great friendship between the United States and India.

JOHNSON: I get confused with later posts. I wasn't as much on the circuit there as I was later in other places. Because I had a boss, my boss would be the one to go to national day receptions and other formal events. Occasionally I got to go to Parliament. But I got to meet a lot of people and they were always very charming and kind and what have you.

Q: You left Sri Lanka in '85. At that time, whither the Sri Lankans from your point of view?

JOHNSON: It hasn't changed. It was foundering in a sense. The domestic problems continued. They continue to this day. It's funny, Mrs. Bandaranaike's daughter was very critical of the United States. I invited her and her husband to lunch one day and suggested that they should visit the US. I got USIS IV grants for them to come to this country and spend a month. I said to her, "Look. You are very critical of the United States. You have never been. You don't know what you are talking about. So I think you should go. Learn what you are talking about. Then you can criticize us. It's fine to criticize us, but at least go." In the end, they didn't come. It's really a pity. She is the President of Sri Lanka now, Mrs. Kumaratunga. It's too bad. It's a country that has been shooting itself in the foot. It's really too bad because they were on the edge of doing quite well, they had a duty free zone and were producing clothes and other goods that we have been buying for years and years.

Q: That is sad.

JOHNSON: It is sad because it's a beautiful place. A lot of Europeans would love to have gone there as tourists.

Q: We'll pick this up the next time. In 1985 you left Sri Lanka and went where?

JOHNSON: I came home. I didn't know how to apply for jobs. I didn't know the Foreign Service technique. My boss was not the kind of guy to help me out this way and the DCM let the ball drop. I came back to a job in NEA public affairs which turned out to be the best job in the world for me. Within one month, I knew everyone in NEA from Assistant Secretary Dick Murphy on down because I was going around getting press guidance cleared, getting people to write it, to clear it, putting together briefing books. It was the luckiest thing I ever did. It wasn't my thing. I wasn't comfortable talking about Middle East peace process and didn't when I could avoid it. But, the job gave me an entree to everyone. Everyone knew me.

Q: Absolutely. Full contact. Okay, so we'll pick it up next time at that point.

Today is the 30th of November 2007. Nancy when did you get this press job?

JOHNSON: I came out of Sri Lanka in '85, so it was the summer of '85. I did it for about six months working with a real pro called Mike Austrian. I was uncomfortable talking with, say, Wolf Blitzer. He knew a great deal more about the subject than I and was looking for any slight change in wording. I knew I could probably give the party line, but

I certainly couldn't watch carefully for the nuances on Middle East peace. When we changed the guidance from 'dislike' to 'hate,' people noticed the change. I felt I was going to get the Department in some kind of trouble. Six months or eight months after that, Wendy Chamberlain grabbed me to come to work in NEA Regional Affairs.

Q: Let's talk about this press guidance. First off, what is your impression of, where did you fit into this? This was '85?

JOHNSON: Yes, I was the extreme munchkin. We got into the office early. Someone at the Press Office had read the newspapers and come up with a series of questions which they assigned to each bureau. People like me went around getting answers. We had to have the answers written and cleared before Mike Austrian and I went to Bernie Kalb, the Spokesman. We always managed to get there first. He had about forty-five minutes before he had to go to a larger meeting. Remember, the briefing started at noon. Sometimes his whole time was spent arguing with us. I was very glad always that Austrian was with me because Mike could deal with the Bernie Kalb who had his own views about the issues that were not necessarily the Department's.

Q: What were you doing? Was it basically generated by news reports?

JOHNSON: Yes. Unless, occasionally there would be some statement that we wanted to get out. But, more often than not, it was the daily press briefing, responding to questions reporters might ask. The press spokesman's briefing book is enormous every day and it covers all the questions that anybody might ask. If something comes up that the spokesman doesn't know about, he'll often say, "I'll take that question." And, if he takes that question, then you have to write an answer and it has to be posted by three o'clock in the afternoon. If you can get an answer. It becomes a formal thing. If he doesn't say, "I'll take that question," then you don't have to answer it. If reporters had any other questions at all, they would call up our office. We were dealing with very senior and experienced reporters like Jean Meserve and Wolf Blitzer. They were all really nice actually, but I always felt I didn't have the background to do this job really comfortably.

Q: The people you were dealing with, the press, were you impressed with their competence?

JOHNSON: Oh yes. They had been doing it for a long time. And they always asked good questions. Their office is down near the press briefing room. They weren't allowed to walk the building. They did their job. We did ours. Sometimes we had lunch with them and would give background briefings to them.

Q: You said Bernie Kalb was the spokesman. I suppose the Middle East pretty well dominated most of the stuff, didn't it?

JOHNSON: Most of it. Some days it didn't. But, he always had questions and he wanted to probe on the answers because I suppose he was trying to figure out how long he could go ad-libbing on things. Of course he had a written answer that he read, the spokesman

reads. You can see them shifting the pages in the book when they get to the topic. But he needed to know where he could go. It was like a question and answer session every morning.

Q: What was your impression of Kalb and how he dealt with it?

JOHNSON: He was a very able fellow. My parents had met him and his brother, Marvin, in Indonesia at some point. And they were impressed with him too. I mean he was a smart man and he was a good spokesman. But, he was a feisty person to deal with, pugnacious sometimes.

Q: Was the office a well oiled machine or everybody running around or how would you put it?

JOHNSON: Oh, our office was an extremely well oiled machine. My boss was the head of it. And the number two, a man whose name I've forgotten, was a USIS officer. They were both extremely good and both used to dealing with the press and enjoyed dealing with the press. We did a whole bunch of other things, including task forces. In the eighties, there were a number of task forces because of hijackings of airplanes. NEA press office was always on the task forces. Later, when I was in NEA Regional Affairs we organized NEA participation on the task forces. NEA Press Office got awards for a number of them. We did the Achille Lauro highjacking among other things. I lose track of where I was for some of these. But all through the eighties, there were a whole lot of NEA organized task forces.

Q: Did you get any feel for Dick Murphy and his way of operating?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. I sat in on meetings. He was quiet spoken, thoughtful and just a wonderful gentleman. I think that people responded to him that way. I thought he was terrific. That front office was Dick Murphy, Arnie Raphel was his number two, Jim Platt was the man who did the Gulf and knew all about oil, Robert Peck was the South Asia person and Bob Pelletreau was the Middle East person. This was a wonderful group of people, a really classy bunch of guys.

Q: Wendy Chamberlain, what was she and what were you doing with her?

JOHNSON: Wendy was the acting head and then the head of NEA Regional Affairs. She was very close to Arnie Raphel and we were essentially his staff. We each had certain things we did. I was responsible, for example, for following the Arab League. But, I was also then responsible for Dick Murphy's briefing books. I'll never forget one day he was going up to the Hill and I went into his office and I could tell he was very tense. He was wandering around. I brought changes to some of the answers in the briefing book and when I walked out I turned around and said, "Helen Hayes said she had stage fright every time she appeared on the stage." He looked at me and then he started to laugh. That's all he needed because he was getting kind of riled up. A lot of my work was plaguing everybody in the Bureau to produce things. I can't remember all the issues. We just did a

lot of stuff that needed to be done that didn't fit in with any other office. We had the science officer. We had a military guy who handled a lot of the military issues.

Q: The Arab-Israeli thing, that was the major concentration and you were sort of the clean up people elsewhere? Was that kind of it?

JOHNSON: The Israel desk dealt with it. But, then there was special group of Ross and others who . .

Q: This was Dennis Ross?

JOHNSON: Dennis Ross and, later, Dan Kurtzer, the people who formed a special cadre. We had in our office a man called Josiah Rosenblatt who liaised with them. But, there were four or five people who did nothing but peace process. They were in their own world and we didn't do the press guidance for them or anything like that because it was a highly specialized, sensitive topic.

Q: How was Wendy Chamberlain?

JOHNSON: She was a super girl.

Q: I mean she had risen to very high rank. She is now retired. But, how did you find her?

JOHNSON: She was a super boss. One of the things I found really impressive was that she made a real effort to keep us all informed of what was going on. She would come back from senior staff meetings and call a meeting and tell us what was happening so that we knew what was going on in the Bureau, the key things that were going on. She was very fair minded and a hard working person. And, she made sure that we all got opportunities. There was a young officer, first tour or second tour person, that Wendy sent off on a trip to the Middle East. She made sure that I got to go with a group from the White House, with Don Gregg, on a ten day trip in Air Force Two or Three or Four, whatever it was, doing advance for then Vice President Bush's trip to the Middle East in '86. It was fabulous, my introduction to the Middle East.

Q: Don Gregg was Vice President Bush's political advisor?

JOHNSON: Yeah. Yeah. That's right. It was a very interesting trip. As I say, I was a munchkin. When we got to Andrews Air Force Base, I found I was assigned a seat at the back of the plane. I got to talking with a couple of women at the airport. One of them was Barbara Bush's Chief of Staff and the other one was a woman in Protocol called Jennifer Fitzgerald who was, I think, a good friend of Vice President Bush. The two women were assigned to sit together and I think they didn't particularly want to sit together so they invited me to join them and I became the buffer. We had a wonderful time. It was terrific because that put me at the top table and I could talk with Don Gregg and say, "You're not going into the West Bank by yourself with the Israelis," and that sort of thing.

Q: How about Southeast Asia? That was part of NEA at the time.

JOHNSON: It was part of NEA.

Q: It almost seemed to get overlooked, didn't it?

JOHNSON: It was pretty quiet, yes. It was a pretty quiet place compared with what was going on in the Middle East. I can't remember much going on with them. I'm sure there was a lot. India and Pakistan being at one another's throats as usual. Nothing strikes me particularly for that period.

Q: How about the Iran-Iraq War? Was that going on when you were there?

JOHNSON: Yes. Let me think. Yes it was. I think this was the period of the reflagging of ships. Was it? Because I was putting together briefing books, I was aware of these issues going on. I was in and out of offices. But, I wasn't making policy and wasn't responsible for implementing it.

Q: How long did you do that?

JOHNSON: I did it for two years and then it was time to move on. I decided, coming in mid-level, that I had only enough time to do one hard language. I crossed off the tonal ones and I decided I didn't want to do Russian, so I would do Arabic. I bid on jobs that would require me to have Arabic. What I really wanted was Baghdad.

Q: Why?

JOHNSON: I just thought it would be an adventure. God knows. It was a stretch for me since I was below grade and of the three bidders, two were at grade. Every year the Bureau office directors and the Front Office sit down and go through who has bid on what and decide who will be the Bureau's candidate for each job. We call that meeting "the cattle market." Wendy came back from it and told me that when they got to Baghdad, Dick Murphy said, "Whatever Nancy wants, Nancy gets." We waited for the two people at grade to take other assignments, which they did. I got assigned to Baghdad via two years of Arabic, which was delightful. I was very pleased. I did one year of Arabic here and a year in Tunisia.

Q: How did you find Arabic?

JOHNSON: The first week we had an exercise. The word for mountain is jibal and the General who invaded Spain was Tarik, so they called the big rock jibaltarik, that is Gibraltar. That caught my fancy and I thought, "I like this." What I learned about Arabic is that it's very logical, especially the way we are taught it. It has a root system. Once you got the hang of it, you could make a slew of words by manipulating participles that no Arab would ever use, but they would understand what you were trying to say. You could manipulate the language in certain ways. Arabic was hard to learn because there are

hardly any cognates. Alcohol, algebra. I'll never forget we were given a list of cognates by the teachers. Going through it during a break, we came to hashish. The eager young Yemeni teacher said, "That means grass." And the smooth New Yorker said, "It means grass here too." [laughter] But, it was a very good program. Here in Washington, we learned how to talk about wars and revolutions. FSI has a famous Arabic reading book called "the Green Book" because it had green covers. It was a collection of excerpts from newspapers and even though they are really outdated, it gave excellent background information. I remember one article on Iraq was about Abdul Karem Qasim and, of course, he was there before Saddam. From this book you learned a lot of stuff about the Middle East and what was going on at the U.N. in the sixties and seventies. I liked the language a lot, but learning it was hard work. I am not a natural linguist. I don't have a high Mlat. I never spoke like a native, but I could read newspapers and so I spoke like a newspaper. I was one of the great comic turns in the Middle East. This face isn't supposed to speak Arabic and when it does, Arabs love it.

Q: How did you find Tunisia?

JOHNSON: I liked it a lot. I was very lucky. I had three colleagues, one I joined the Foreign Service with and the other two I'd studied Arabic with in Washington. Brad Hanson, who is now the DCM in Uzbekistan, Deborah Elliot and Gil Sherman, who is now dead. The four of us did things in pairs or as a group. Gil and Brad used to do exercises together. Brad and I went stamp collecting together. Deborah and Gil did gardening. It was that kind of thing. But then we'd take trips as a group on long weekends. Gil had a car and we went all over Tunisia and had a super time. About the third or fourth week, one of the teachers asked me if I would like a tutor because I was feeling the need for conversation. I said, "yes." He told me the tutor was his sister-in-law. He thought we would get on well and we did. Her name is Noura. I went to her house then twice a week for the rest of the year at my own expense. Noura and I became good friends. We still exchange Christmas cards. Since I had no French and she didn't speak English, we talked in classical Arabic, not the Arabic she spoke normally. She worked on her Arabic and so did I. Eventually, by the end of the year, we were talking about everything. It was a wonderful experience for me to have a Tunisian who I could talk with and ask questions once I got a vocabulary and could use the language well enough. It was terrific.

Q: Did you pick up anything about the government and the situation in Tunisia?

JOHNSON: Oh yes. One of the things that struck us was that we never ran into anyone from the Embassy on the trips we'd go on and that struck us a crazy because it is a lovely country to visit. You should be out seeing it. We were there at a peculiar time because Ben Ali, the President, had just become president. There was an election which he won. The opposition ran a weak candidate. I kept saying to people that he didn't need to destroy the opposition before he began to run because he was very popular. We were there at a time when the country was opening after Bourguiba's long rule. I am not sure the country is as open now as it was then. We worked really hard doing Arabic every day so I don't think we had as many contacts with the Tunisians as it would have been nice to

have. One of our fellow students was a gifted natural linguist and developed beautiful Arabic. He played chess with a group of old guys in Sidi Bou Said where the school was and that brought him lot of contacts. The rest of us had fewer contacts.

Q: How about Arabic spoken in Tunisia?

JOHNSON: It is nothing like classical Arabia, it is highly Berberized, it has a lot of Berber and a lot of French in it. Tunisians switch between codes as the linguist used to call it, that is, mix languages in one sentence. It wasn't good Arabic. You were better off with French, which I didn't have, if you didn't want Arabic. One night I had a taxi driver who happened to teach classical Arabic in school and on the way to the airport I got a lesson. People can understand classical Arabic. Tunisians telescope the language. My favorite example of this is the word for garbage, which in more classical Arabic is "zibala." Tunisians say "zibla." They have their own style of Arabic and their own particular accent which was hard for me, not a linguist, to deal with. Some of my fellow-students didn't have any problems.

Q: You were there from when to when? I mean you were taking Arabic from when to when?

JOHNSON: I studied Arabic from '87 to '89, spending the year '88-'89 in Tunisia.

Q: Then you are off to Baghdad?

JOHNSON: I went to Bagdad in August of '89.

Q: What was your job?

JOHNSON: I was the political officer. Ultimately, I got a deputy but that was much later.

Q: Okay, let's talk about the situation when you got there in '89 in Bagdad.

JOHNSON: The Iran-Iraq War was just over. It had been over for about a year. We never had cozy relations with the regime. It was a police state. Saddam took the best of Stalin and Hitler's systems and refined them. The DCM's secretary lived across the street from me in a duplex house. (This is the example I give to people about the kind of regime it was.) The other half of the house was occupied by the man who owned both houses. There was a fence in the garden gate so Donna, her name was Donna Richard, could go a visit the neighbors without the watchers on the street being aware of it. At one stage, a member of the landlord's family disappeared. Some time later the family got to pay $100 to get the body back. When Donna went over, the discussion was whether the landlord should call on the close relatives of the deceased to express condolences. Now, this is not a question that would come up in any other Arab country. It was something that you do as part of a family. It is not a question. But in the Iraq of Saddam Hussein, you wanted to keep your head down. If you stuck your head up it got lopped off. It was much better just not to be noticed and quietly get on with your life. The landlord and his wife decided to

go and pay their respects. I don't know whether there were any repercussions or not. My house was bugged I am sure. The phone was bugged. I lived down the street from "Chemical Ali," one of Saddam's relatives. There were always guys sitting in front of that house with guns watching the street. My parents came and visited me for a month and used to take a walk in the morning. Every day, they would say "Good morning" to those guards and wave. Eventually the guys would wave back.

One of my other favorite stories about what it was like to be in Bagdad is the following. My phone was downstairs. I was in bed one night and the phone rang. I went down to answer it and there was nobody on the line but I could hear a kind of sound in the background. I hung up the phone and went back upstairs. Fifteen minutes later it rang again. I went down and said, "Hello." Still nothing, but I could hear this background hum. I hung up and went back upstairs. Fifteen minutes later the phone rang again. And I came down. This time I picked up the phone, but I didn't say anything. Eventually, I heard someone say in Arabic, "Well, she picked up the phone," and someone said, "Put it down. Put it down." Also, "Oops." Plunk. And they didn't call back again.

A young English diplomat had taken his SUV out into the desert. You had to have permission to go anywhere outside of Bagdad. He had gone out without permission. He came down one morning and found that all the pictures on the walls had been quietly taken off, while he slept, and put along the wall on the ground. So the mukhabarat had been in to say, "Don't do that again. We can get you."

Often, I would go to a reception and, driving home, be followed by a Passat with a couple of guys in it. I'm sure they were from the Iraqi security services. I felt very safe actually.

Q: I was going to say at a certain level this is . . .

JOHNSON: Except, if they didn't like you, they tried to run you off the road. Before I got there, they ran a communicator off the road and he was injured. I think it was a fine line one was walking. I lived in a very nice house, a duplex with German Embassy people on the other side. I know the house was bugged for certain.

Q: Well, did you have much contact with the _____?

JOHNSON: No. No. Occasionally, with people in a shop. When my parents came I hired an Embassy driver and we took my car and we went to Ashura and then up into Mosul to Nineveh. At Ashura we stopped to look at the wonderful ruins. The antiquities in Iraq are amazing. We stopped and had eaten our lunch and were sitting there relaxing. A group of young women and kids came walking by and we got into conversation. It turns out they were cousins and every Friday the whole family got together. They said there were a hundred of them. They invited us to come and have lunch with them, which was really nice. It was so generous and genuine. I knew, and my folks (Dad having been in the Foreign Service) knew also, that if we had accepted the family would have been in huge . . . [End of Tape 2, side A]

Q: Go ahead, you were saying?

JOHNSON: We knew that dropping in on the family would have been a really interesting experience for us, but it would have been terrible for them because the intelligence people would have been right on them and some of the family probably would have gone to jail or lost their lives. There would have been some action as a result of it, so we didn't accept. We didn't get to know many Iraqis personally. We had the people we dealt with in our various ministries. And, occasionally a shop keeper you'd exchange pleasantries with. But nothing more than that.

Q: As a political officer, how did you operate?

JOHNSON: We had Iraqis who worked in the Embassy who would come and talk about things they were seeing and doing. I had a very experienced Iraqi working for me as Political FSN who had an awful lot of contacts. He had been in the military and then in business so he had a lot of contacts. Over time they proved to be very good.

Q: How did he operate?

JOHNSON: Oh, he just sort of drifted out. He was known. They knew he worked for the Embassy. He had a lot of friends who would stop by and see him at his house and no one was paying attention to that. There were people in other embassies who were very good about sharing. April Glaspie was the ambassador and April once said to me, "The Egyptians are wonderful colleagues." In the spring of 1990 at the time of the Arab League Summit in Baghdad, one of our--I won't get anybody into trouble--one of our Arab colleagues stopped by Joe Wilson's house every night with the latest papers which he shared with us.

Q: During your time in Baghdad, who was the ambassador and the DCM?

JOHNSON: April Glaspie was the ambassador. Joseph C. Wilson was the DCM. Admin was a man called Jim Van Laningham. I was POL. Econ was Daniel Vernon. Jim Ritchie was the DATT and the USIS head was Jim Callaghan. Both Jims were friends of April's. They had worked with April before. I think she picked Joe Wilson because he was a fine admin officer and her biggest problem in Iraq was admin. She knew that before she went to post. I should explain. The U.S. government owned a wonderful embassy with extensive grounds right on the bend of the river which was taken over in 1967 by the Government of Iraq. It became the presidential palace. In my day, the Embassy was in an old house several miles from where our old embassy was. Occasionally, we'd ask the Iraqis to give it back to us.

Q: What was the spirit of the embassy? You were under lots of restrictions and all that.

JOHNSON: It's hard to define. I think it was typical of an embassy in a place with those kinds of restrictions. Some people would go to various embassies to have their Marine Corps nights, i.e. the parties. Some people would do that circuit. Those of us who were in

the diplomatic circuit would go to our nightly receptions and that sort of thing. I think I was generally out five nights a week. Morale was pretty good. I found that it was pretty lonely from my point of view. In Sri Lanka I had had a colleague who, though younger than I, had the same status. She and I could compare notes. She had been in the service longer than I and was somebody I felt comfortable talking with. In Baghdad I didn't have anybody I could talk with and I missed that. I was still new enough to the service. This was only my second post. There were things I would like to have bounced off someone, which I couldn't do.

Q: How was April Glaspie as ambassador?

JOHNSON: April was wonderful. April was amazing because she was such an intelligent woman and very kind. One of the stories I tell about her, and I hope she doesn't mind, took place right before the 1990 Arab League Summit. She had been allowed to go to Oman. For a long time the Brits wouldn't let her go there. The man who had been the British ambassador in Baghdad had gone on to Oman to be ambassador there and invited her to come and spend a long weekend, three or four days. My assignment was to write the background paper for the Arab League Summit meeting. While she was gone I worked away on the cable and left it on her desk the day she came back. About an hour later I got a call and went into her office. We went through this cable and she changed a lot. And so, feeling kind of sorry for myself, on my way out I said, "Well, at least there is one paragraph that's still mine." She said, "Sit down." Now, remember, this is her first day back in the office when she had plenty to do. She then told me the following story.

It was told to her by her mentor who was Hermann Eilts. I don't have all the details, but it seems Eilts was the Iraq desk officer and did the Baghdad Pact as well. He was on an airplane with John Foster Dulles going to a Baghdad Pact meeting in Europe. Dulles had said, "Young man, write me a speech." Dulles was at the front of the airplane and Eilts at the back. During the long the flight-- in those days it was eighteen hours to Europe—Eilts had worked on this speech and wrote it out very carefully so Dulles could read his handwriting. They get to wherever they were going and Dulles gave the speech. It was not the speech that Eilts wrote for him. Afterwards, Eilts was standing there feeling really down and a hand came down on his shoulder. It was Dulles who said, "Young man, I want to thank you for the speech." And Eilts replied, "But you didn't use it." To which Dulles replied, "Yes, but you gave me all the ideas I needed." The point of the story was that although April had worked with the words of the cable that went out, all the ideas, the shape of it and the thrust of it, were mine. What I really appreciated was that she had taken that much trouble, the five minutes or whatever it took, because she didn't want me to go away feeling too depressed about my work. It was really nice of her. She was for years, for women in the Service, a model of how you conduct yourself, how you prepare yourself. She was a model.

There were moments in Baghdad when she was positively brilliant. For example, the Department ordered us to give a demarche to somebody on Libyan terrorism and the dangers that caused. I went along as April's note taker. She had arranged to have a meeting with the head of the U.N. branch of the Foreign Ministry. We went into his

office. It seems that she and he had been together in Cairo. He started talking about how much he admired Eilts. April said, "You know, the whole time that we were in Cairo, Eilts was under threat of death from the Libyans." And he was right there in the palm of her hand. She had picked the one man in the Iraqi government who would listen to and understand a demarche on Libyan terrorism. When we went out, I asked her if she had done that on purpose and she said, "Yes." So she knew what she was doing and how to do it. She had excellent Arabic and knew all kinds of people.

Q: You mention the Arab League and that you had it back in Washington too. In the eighties, what did the Arab League amount to?

JOHNSON: Not much. But we needed to follow it because there our friends and enemies in the Arab world would come out with statements. And, of course, we would try to get the statement to be less hostile to us than it might have been. They made pronouncements on all sorts of things. Of course they had the Arab boycott against companies that did business with Israel that we tried to undo and had been working at undoing for years. They had some power within the Middle East. Arabs are most comfortable with consensus. Their traditions are to develop a consensus and then stick with it. A big argument and a winner take all kind of situation is not their style. The Arab League was a way to give people cover for doing things.

Q: Was this a time to get all sorts of soundings of these people and what they are up to?

JOHNSON: Yes. Before it began, our colleagues in all the other Arab countries were out asking questions and posing hypothetical situations and trying to find out what their contacts' countries planned to do or not. When the meeting is in your country, you want to know exactly what's happening. This is why it was so valuable that one of our Arab colleagues would come to Joe every night and give him the papers from the day's meeting. We knew where the discussions were going and what the pronouncements were going to be. Joe would come in in the morning with the papers. He would have much preferred if the guy had come to my house, but he lived near Joe and it was much easier for him to stop by Joe's house. And Joe got to write the cable.

Q: What was the relationship between Joe Wilson, who was essentially an African hand, and administrative officer April Glaspie who was Middle Eastern expert par excellence?

JOHNSON: That's a hard one to answer because I didn't see it. I think it was comfortable. I don't know how often she talked with him about policy issues when I wasn't there. It must have been fairly often because he is very astute is Joe and very good on his feet. When she was gone, he was the Charge. He needed to be up on all the issues and he was, because he is a smart guy and has really good political instincts.

Q: Was there much in the way of contact with, you know, the official contacts? How did you find this?

JOHNSON: There were a lot of them. We were very fortunate in a way because Nizar Hamdoon had served as Iraqi ambassador in the United States and liked the United States. I can remember Joe telling me that the year before I got to Baghdad, he had had a Halloween party and Nizar and his wife came as Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. They had bought these cowboy outfits while they were in this country. Nizar was a person we . .

Q: He was Prime Minister?

JOHNSON: No, he was the number three or number four in the Foreign Ministry. He was a very useful person to have as a contact because we could go to Nizar and talk turkey with him in ways we might not have been able to do with people a couple of ranks higher up or who lacked his experience of Washington. One of my stories about Baghdad that I've never told April, and I don't know why, is about a Foreign Ministry dinner we attended with some American visitors. I was sitting with a senior member of the Foreign Minister. He turned to me and said, "Miss Nancy, why did they send us a woman ambassador?" I don't think of myself as particularly quick on my feet, but I said immediately, "They didn't send you a woman. They sent you the best that they had, the best Arabist, the most experienced person in the region, the very best they had." He looked at me and he said, "Oh. I'll tell them that." One of the myths people have about women operating in the Middle East is that because women are or seem to be second class citizens, they can't be effective. I think that my conversation reveals something quite other and that is because women are not threatening, people will say things to them that are much more revealing than to a man who is a competitor. Women can be extremely effective.

Q: I've also talked to women officers. One of the things too is that they could go to the K____ Hareem or whatever it is and this is of course where the real news is anyway because this puts you right in the middle of the information network. This ability to go backwards and forwards. In the diplomatic world, male or female or what, you are an American representative which means that you carry an awful lot of clout. People appreciate it, accept that.

JOHNSON: Yes. It was interesting because that man would never have asked a man, one of my male colleagues, that question. My answer, I thought, was really quite a good one. I am rather proud of that. There were all sorts of difficulties in Baghdad. Every room in the Foreign Ministry was bugged including the waiting area. You could see microphones hanging from the ceiling. If somebody in the Foreign Ministry wanted to say something to you off the cuff, they'd say it to you when you were in the hall.

There are things I remember. For example, there was a man behind the reception desk at the Foreign Ministry. You would enter and say, "I'm here to see so and so," and he would call them up and then you would sit and wait until someone came to fetch you. I called him 'Smiley' because he was a very dour fellow. One day I was sitting there and he said, "Miss Nancy, how old are you?" And I said, "Why do you ask?" He said, "Well, we've decided that you are 35," which was very funny because I was then 47 or 48. He couldn't believe it. I was amused that they didn't have anything better to do in the Foreign

Ministry than to talk about my age. Then there was one time I went in to meet with a woman I had never met before. I didn't know how good her English was so I prepped myself to do my demarche in Arabic. Her English was about as good as my Arabic. We did it in English and I said to her, "I came prepared to do this Arabic." She said, "Fine. Do it." I then did it in Arabic amid gales of laughter. Whenever I made a mistake, she'd say, "lah," which means "no" and then give me the correct word. Iraqis were not without humor.

Q: From all accounts, the Iraqis are very intelligent people. The tragedy is its divisions and its leadership.

JOHNSON: And the divisions are profound, city, country. One of the things we never got into as foreigners is the whole issue of tribes. Everybody in the Middle East knows to which tribe they belong. And we don't. It is subtle and there are all kinds of antagonisms and loyalties we don't know anything about. I think it would take a lifetime. I guess Phebe Marr would come closer to knowing about that than anybody else.

Q: What was your impression in Iraq? Iraq had just won a war, but nothing really had happened, nothing had changed except that you had maybe one or two million men killed.

JOHNSON: It would be a classic Pyrrhic victory. Everyone was touched by the war. If Iraq's population was 18 million when it began, it was 17 million afterwards. They had gained nothing. Of course, you could never get a sense of how anyone felt about it because no one would say. Iraqis kept their heads down. They wouldn't comment on anything to a foreigner like me because if it got back to the intelligence people they were in trouble. It was in many ways a very closed society. Although people were, as the girls in Ashura were, very friendly and interested. My folks and I toured a monastery north of Mosul. My mother and I came out and found a group of young people, a school group of college kids. They were awfully cute kids and started to talk to us in English. One of them turned to my mother and said, "This is the father." Just at that point, my Dad was stepping out the door and my mother pointed to him and said, "That's the father. I am the mother." They all laughed and then spent half an hour playing games with the English language with us. It turns out they were Kurds and many had relatives in Detroit. All wanted to go to Detroit. They didn't think much of Saddam. But, that was just a very rare occasion.

Q: I have interviewed Beth Jones who was there before you, I think. And she said during the war how she got a little from some of the Iraqi officials who were just shocked at some of the attacks they were getting of the Kuwaitis. I mean, kids going into battle without a weapon but with a piece of paper which would make them invulnerable. They just had not realized what a buzz saw they were getting into.

JOHNSON: We didn't have anything like that. The Defense Attaché may have been getting bits and pieces of the aftermath from his colleagues, but it was very difficult for us to break into anything. The myth that we were buddy buddy with the Iraqi regime is a huge myth, because we weren't. I think it was difficult for whatever intelligence

swapping we were doing quite officially. Even that I think was difficult. For the rest of us, it was hard. You see, there weren't for example opposition political parties that I could go and talk with. The regime often seemed to be hostile to us, but on one occasion it wasn't. The US Government had declared a First Secretary at the Iraqi Mission to the UN persona non grata. We three First Secretaries in Baghdad sat around that afternoon speculating about which of us would be PNGed in return. In fact, the Iraqis PNGed the newest member of the Embassy, a young man who had just arrived because, April was told, they figured he hadn't had time to become really useful.

Q: Were you getting any feel for the Kurdish, Sunni, Shia, Arab, Persian divisions within Iraq?

JOHNSON: The Kurds were always something separate. The Shia/Sunni division was less clear in those days. But the Kurds, one knew about Halabja, where Saddam and co. dropped chemical weapons on the Kurds. There were stories about the Kurds being carried south and killed. There were settlements. April sent me on a five day trip up into the north when I first arrived and we went past settlements of Kurds who had been moved out of places like Kirkuk when Arabs had been moved in. What we see now is a kind of ethnic cleansing in reverse. Saddam made an effort to Arabize the oil industry. Now the Kurds want their towns back. You got a sense that the Kurds were somewhat separate. In 1967, when we were essentially thrown out of Middle East, it was the Kurds who closed up our Embassy in Baghdad, packed up peoples' houses and brought their household effects out through Iran. They looked after the Embassy property for years and years before the Americans went back.

Q: What were picking up about Saddam Hussein and his coterie?

JOHNSON: Not a lot of particular details. They were a pretty nasty group. I was at a place once where the sons turned up and they were lording it over people. People were afraid, you could see. A 'frisson' went through the audience when they arrived. This was an arts show outside in the summer at someplace, I can't remember where. But a tension was created by the presence of these two guys and all these men in black who were their bodyguards. There were the stories of Saddam. You could see occasionally the motorcade zipping along and if there was a light blue Mercedes, it was the Saddam entourage. There were palaces here, there, and everywhere. People didn't talk about it much. You knew it was a fascist regime. There were stories and the famous pictures of Saddam ordering people out of a meeting to be eliminated.

Q: I have seen that.

JOHNSON: Yes. But, being there you didn't see him that often except on television every night. Television news always began with 15 minutes of what the leader did that day.

Q: As political officer, what were you reporting?

JOHNSON: I was reporting what was being carried in the newspaper, what rumors we heard, what was coming out of our meetings with government officials, with people like the representative of the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) told us and so on. The ICRC was dealing with prisoners of war on both sides of the Iran/Iraq War and played a key role in trying to get prisoner swaps. The local representative was a very nice fellow who got to see a bit of the world we didn't see. We occasionally talked with him. We talked with other people who had excellent contacts in ways that we didn't. I mean we discovered during the crisis that there were quite a lot of American citizens. April and her mother tried something that was very interesting. They had a tea or morning coffee about once every six weeks or maybe it was once a month for American women who were married to Iraqis. Some of them turned out to be old friends who had married Iraqis in the '50s for example and hadn't had contact with each other in years. I went to one of the teas and it was really interesting. The women talked about what it was like to live in Iraqi society. One of them was very interesting about what it was like when she first came and how it had changed over the years. I asked her specifically about whether the country was becoming more religious and how it affected her children and that sort of thing. She said it was becoming more conservative. Her teenage son was often scandalized when she went out without covering her arms. The teas were a clever idea because they were something the women could do as Americans without putting their families in any danger. None of the husbands ever came into the residence. It was just the wives. There were other people in similar circumstances such as the Japanese. There were quite a number of Japanese women married to Iraqis. There were lots and lots of Philippina women who worked as housemaids for various senior Iraqis. If they had had any Arabic, they would have been wonderful sources, but they didn't. And we talked with our fellow diplomats who would glean bits and pieces of information. The diplomats were always sharing because you wanted to make sure all your bits fit together. I remember in particular my Japanese counterpart would come to me because he had information but he didn't know how to put it into any context that made sense. He would come and pick my brain about it.

Q: Did you get any feel about the interest or lack thereof about the State Department and what was going on in Iraq?

JOHNSON: It wasn't until the crisis. I had the sense that people were reading our stuff, that there was a continuing, maybe not deep interest, but a continuing interest in what was happening in Iraq and a realization that this was an interesting place. Something could blow there. And then as the crisis developed, it was very interesting. It was late July of 1990. Saddam moved 120,000 troops south. Nobody knew what he had in mind. The Defense Attaché said, "Look, you don't move 120,000 troops to the desert when it is 120 degrees. You are not going to leave them sitting there. They are going to move." But, nobody knew for sure.

Defense Attaches would get permission to drive to Kuwait. Everybody shared information. The British Defense Attaché was driving home from Kuwait and saw all the soldiers and equipment moving south. He confirmed it was moving south. That was the way we knew these things. And then all of sudden, of course, they crossed the border.

Q: Let's talk about that.

JOHNSON: Oh, before that, it was traditional that the ambassadors went away in August.

Q: Damn good idea.

JOHNSON: Damn good given the climate, given that nothing ever happens in August. Saddam had called in most of the ambassadors one by one in the last week of July. It was the famous conversation that April had with him that I didn't go along to because you never knew it was going to be Saddam. We thought the meeting was going to be with someone in the Foreign Ministry. She went along without a note taker and she was there with Saddam for several hours. Knowing she had been called to the Foreign Ministry, she called Washington before hand, I remember this, and asked for anything from NEA. Was there anything they wanted her to say? Assistant Secretary Kelly had given testimony on the Hill a couple of days before. We had Kelly's remarks and the general press briefing. But Jim Baker was off dealing with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Very definitely it was a one crisis at a time kind of Administration. There were running jokes about people who were in favor, I mean, Baker and his coterie didn't trust the building. Therefore, they didn't use the building. I think they got caught when the crisis really blew in 1990 because they were concentrating on something else. But, back to Iraq. I seem to recall that Saddam had called in ambassadors one by one and said, "My desires are peaceful. Please go home and tell your people that I want peace" or something to that effect. The ambassadors all took off. The only one who was not allowed to come back was April. The Department made the decision as our way of showing displeasure. Everybody else got back. The Brits came back. The Russians came back. Until they did, it was the Charges' crisis. For a while it was tricky for the ambassadors to get back because there weren't any airplanes flying. The Iraqis closed the borders to air traffic. The ambassadors wriggled back in coming overland from Jordan after August second. Poor April, they made it look as if she was the only one out of the country at the time of the crisis. She wasn't. They were all gone.

Q: Prior to the crisis, were you getting anything from Saudi Arabia or Jordan? Were they a presence?

JOHNSON: Yes. We knew that Saddam was getting desperate for money, but we couldn't figure out why. He was putting pressure on the Kuwaitis. He was putting pressure on the Saudis. There was the famous story about a Kuwaiti who came up to negotiate and ended up being a virtual prisoner at some point. Saddam was not hiding this. He was talking. He gave speeches talking about getting something back. He made it clear that he was unhappy with Kuwait. He was also wary of us. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, of course the Soviet Union had been a great supporter of Iraq, we were the only super power. We had this big fleet in the Gulf, didn't we? He wasn't sure where we were going to go and, of course, they hadn't had lovely relations with us for many years. We were not close friends.

Q: With this troop movement and all, was the embassy on alert? What was the feeling that you were getting?

JOHNSON: Well, we were always on alert. It was that kind of place. We didn't know what they had in mind. Our best estimate was that they would go into Kuwait and come out again. When they actually moved, that wasn't a huge surprise. I used to leave my house to get to the Embassy about 6:30 in the morning. I went in early to read the cable traffic and do all sorts of things. I will never forget, it was about 6:15 in the morning, I was just about to go out the door and Joe Wilson rang and he said, "They crossed the border." I'm told I replied, "Oh shit," which was probably just as good a reply as any. I went into the office. Then, for the next three weeks, we were in real crisis mode.

Q: What were you doing?

JOHNSON: One group of people were shredding like mad. We were told the first day to get down to a 25 minute burn, then to a 10 minute burn, then to no burn. One of the things I noted in this little diary I started to keep was that the background noise for the first couple of weeks was the shredders going. There was one on the second floor. There had been one on the third floor but the Marines brought it down so there were two shredders going. The Defense Attaché had four big safes full of stuff. Unfortunately we shredded April's lifetime notes on the Palestinians that could have been made into a book. It was very liberating not to have any files. The cable traffic would come in, you'd read it and then you'd shred it. We were busy cleaning out the embassy and tracking down American citizens. A lot of American citizens turned up whom we didn't know were in Iraq. They came into the Consular section to register, to make their presence known. There were an awful lot of them. One of the serious questions was whether to shred the passports of people who had left their passports at the Embassy for safe keeping. The Consular folks decided to shred because if the Iraqis came over the walls to take us—and we had the example of '79 ten years earlier in Iran--it would have been dangerous for those people, so we got rid of everything. People were hacking away destroying communications gear and other sensitive material up in one of the attic rooms, material I never saw. One of the ironies is what do you do with the shredded pulp? They had bags and bags of it. They took it around into the back part of the garden, emptied the bags out and ended up with a mountain of shredded paper. Had we added flour, when it next rained, I guess we would have created one of the world's greatest piles of papier-mache.

When the Iraqis went into Kuwait, ultimately our embassy in Kuwait was closed and the American staff came north. So did other people who were captured by the Iraqis in Kuwait. I remember there was one man, an oil worker, who had been up in a derrick early in the morning as the Iraqi planes and helicopters, at his eye level, came by. He could wave to the Iraqi pilots. People became prisoners and were put in various hotels in Baghdad. Tracking what was happening to the Americans who were brought up from Kuwait was something we did. The Embassy was mostly doing consular work. I was getting material here and there and was writing at least one and sometimes two sit reps every day based on whatever information I could get. People who worked in the embassy

provided information from their contacts with their family and friends. We also made our own observations of what was going on. Early on, it was very clear the Iraqis were looting Kuwait because the streets of Baghdad were filled with cars with Kuwaiti license plates within two days of the invasion. We were following events as best we could, listening to the Iraqi radio and TV, to our staff. Our colleagues in Kuwait were letting us know about as much as they could. I guess by then we were getting better intelligence from various sources than we had before August 2. Have you talked to Barbara Bodine?

Q: No. I am in communication with her and I will.

JOHNSON: She had been in Baghdad and had promised her family she would not go back to Iraq. Early in August, while talking to her father, she said, "They came to me." It was a very tense time. When they closed the borders we didn't know whether we could, whether we'd ever . . . I kept jokingly saying, "I always wanted to be a hostage so I could stop smoking and lose weight at the same time." That seemed to be a very real possibility. The guys talked about getting vans and four wheeled drive vehicles in case we had to make a run for the border, but the border was six hours away. We weren't going to make a run anywhere. We were trying to make arrangements to get people out. After a while, we got permission for the first convoy, to send out family members, pets, and a couple of college kids who were summer interns. I remember we got the permissions and sent the convoy off to the border which was a six or seven hour drive away. They were stopped there and sent back. The tension in the embassy was palpable because the guys were so worried. A couple of days later, screaming and yelling at the Foreign Ministry and with the help of Nizar, we finally got permission for the convoy to leave the country. They were allowed to leave. When they crossed the border, everybody relaxed because their families were out of danger. It didn't matter that they were still in danger. Their families were out of danger. The first tranche of people who left were the families. Then it was decided to reduce the Embassy further. Since the major purpose of the Embassy was then consular, the Marines and a bunch of us left. I was told to go. I was not at all happy about that decision. I talked with Joe about it and I wrote in my little diary that the reasons he gave to me were sexist. "We want all the women out of here" kind of thing. That really wasn't an adequate reason. Looking back on it, I'm glad I went. It would have been a very difficult time to be there, given the personalities.

We were the base for all the American reporters who came in. I thought Dan Rather was a very nice fellow. Ted Koppel and others used the Embassy and they picked our brains.

Q: This is a peculiar thing. Here are all these reporters who are allowed to go in . . .

JOHNSON: We weren't allowed out without permission. The reporters came and talked with people and did their reports. We tried to do our jobs as best we could. The hours became impossible because we were doing 15 hour, 16 hour days, 17 hour days at least. If you got as much rest as four or five hours sleep you were lucky. A lot of things happened at night. Mel Ang, who was my number two, had done the Tiananmen Square evacuation. Iraq was his first political assignment, but he was soon back doing consular work. He went out to all the hotels keeping track of all the Americans there and getting

messages from them to pass home, such as from husband x to the family saying, "I'm okay. I'm here. Don't worry," and that kind of thing. I can remember coming up with toothbrushes and deodorant and razors for these people. Eventually a bunch of them ended up at the ambassador's residence which the Bechtel people organized into a university. They had lectures in the mornings and the afternoons. People lectured about their hobbies and their interests. They passed the time and slept in shifts because there wasn't enough room for everyone to sleep at once. There was a pool. We would take them food from various places. Some of them would come out in the day and go shopping, but of course they did not have a lot to do while they were there. After a couple of weeks, some of the people were moved around the country to places that Saddam wanted to have hostages in so that we would not attack them. That was scary for people.

Q: What was the feeling of the American and western reaction to this?

JOHNSON: I think we were all waiting for firmness. I need to talk a little bit about the cable that April wrote about her meeting with Saddam, the famous cable. A lot of people forget that ambassadors cannot declare war. If she had said, "If you cross that border into Kuwait the full force and might of the United States will be down upon you," that's a declaration of war. When I was at the Army War College, I told people that and they were surprised. It never occurred to them. The most that a diplomat can say is, "If you cross that border, my national interests will be affected." We didn't have a defense treaty with Kuwait. They never wanted one with us. We had no grounds for threatening Saddam. Any criticism of April for that was a mistake. It's funny, I haven't read April's cable since it left Baghdad but I remember reading it at the time. It was about seven o'clock in the evening. There was something about it that bothered me. I couldn't put my finger on what it was. Because I couldn't put my finger on what it was, I couldn't go to April's office and say, "There is something about this that bothers me." I mean it was too late. It had to go to Washington. Washington was waiting for it. I feel bad about it to this day. I think more than anything else it was the tone of it. It seemed a little too sycophantic, a little too pro-Saddam. It gave people the wrong idea about where the Embassy was or where we stood in relation to Iraq. It had not become more Iraqi than the Iraqis, as sometimes happens. There were limits to what April could say to give Saddam a warning that we might act. But then, of course, we didn't know that we would act and it wasn't until Maggie Thatcher came . . No, first early on, George Bush had said, "This will not stand." I thought that was a good sign. We were all for that. I remember sitting in Joe's office one afternoon. He wasn't there. One of the problems was getting enough sleep. Every afternoon the Charges and DCMs would meet and share information. Often Joe would go home for lunch and not be in the Embassy in the afternoon. We were sitting in his office reading the Vienna Convention on diplomatic usage and roaring with laughter because we were just thinking, "Will they honor it?" In fact, they did. For those assigned to Baghdad, they honored it. For those assigned to Kuwait, they didn't because they said, "It's a 19th province and they're not diplomats accredited to us."

Q: Joe Wilson had a meeting with Saddam.

JOHNSON: Yes, I took the notes for that.

Q: How did that go?

JOHNSON: We were called to the Foreign Ministry and then taken to the Presidency where we waited an hour. Then we were taken back to the Foreign Ministry where we met Saddam. We had this two hour meeting with Saddam. I'll never forget. It was not exactly cordial, but it was an interesting meeting. I was writing like mad. I remember Nizar saying to the translator, "Slow down. Nancy can't write that fast." We received all these assurances from Saddam, empty words and we knew that. We had the meeting, we went back to the Embassy, I did the verbatim cable, Joe called Washington with a verbal report and then did a quick, high points cable. What I should add is that on Day One (August 2) the phone lines were cut. We went into the Foreign Ministry, Joe and I, and he said, "Look Nizar, with your army in Kuwait and my fleet in the Gulf, we need a direct line to Washington, don't you agree?" Nizar agreed. By the time we got back to the Embassy the phone lines were restored. We had a line to a task force in Washington. If you needed to get the task force's attention, you'd be screaming into the phone trying to get somebody to respond. Eventually, after a day of this, we set up a system whereby somebody monitored the phone. Somebody in Washington came to the phone every 15 minutes or so. I wrote in my little diary, I'd forgotten of course it was time to be bidding on jobs for the next year. I remember calling in and saying, "I need to talk to a Foreign Service Officer from NEA." The person they put on the line for me to talk with was April. I had a chat with her about the jobs I should bid on. It turned out to be very helpful. She was back in Washington. It was very frustrating for her. I think it would have been very different if she had been in Baghdad running the show. It would have been very different.

Q: What was your impression of Joe Wilson at this time?

JOHNSON: Joe was a very competent guy. I think that he was sensitive to not being a Middle East person and sensitive to being new to April. She would come down to my office to bum a cigarette and talk NEA shop with me. He would, within a minute, be there. For a while I thought it was just me, but he did it with everyone. I think that Joe wasn't as comfortable with all of us as April was because he didn't know us NEA people. But he was very able. And, as I say, he was quick on his feet. He knew his stuff. He comes from a long line of politicians apparently. I used to think he should be in politics. He was a good person to have there. He had been a surfer in his youth, I think, and he was a laid back guy which is also good to have in a crisis.

Q: What was the atmosphere outside? Were you surrounded by Iraqi security types?

JOHNSON: Life went on pretty much as usual. The Iraqi security people continued to follow us. I can remember one night the RSO came tearing into the embassy all excited, all panicky about a demonstration that was going on. It was some kind of air raid drill. All the Young Pioneers and other Baath Party groups were out in the streets in their uniforms, like cub scouts and such. We had a couple of demonstrations in front of the embassy, very peaceful, very well organized. They came and presented their petitions and

then went on. Things were not that different. You could go and do your shopping. In the three weeks or so that I was there, I can remember I went to the German Embassy for something. It wasn't awfully far from our Embassy. The car wasn't there when I came out to go back because the streets had been blocked because of the demonstrations in front of our Embassy. So I walked back to our Embassy in front of the demonstrators, saying "Hi" to the kids. It was pretty peaceful. Nothing was happening.

Q: You left when?

JOHNSON: It was the third week in August. I've forgotten the exact date. In fairness, we were all exhausted. I can remember we started off at least once before. We were going to fly. As soon as Iraqi Airlines started to fly again, we were going to fly. Then they wouldn't let us fly on an airplane so we had to go by road. So I guess I left on August 20th, arrived in Amman Monday, August 21st. We had our meeting. We left in the middle of the night and had this incredible trip. Let's see [reading from journal, in italics], *Word came of travel permission 13:30 Monday, August 20th. My car is on the list so gave keys to Abbas for them to check it over. I'll have two passengers. I pack up, clean kitchen and do laundry. Slept from 8 to 11 p.m. then up and at 12:30 go back to the embassy where we all mill around for an hour. Joe gives us a pep talk and we set off at 2:15 a.m. on August 22nd and we arrive in Amman at 10 p.m. that same day on August 22nd*. We had been up for hours and hours.

It is interesting because the embassy was going all day and all night because there was somebody monitoring the phone. Somebody had the bright idea to bring in food. We would have a picnic, grilling things on a barbecue outside Joe's office on a balcony. People were wandering around in their scruffy clothes. I had a dress and stockings in the office and when it was time to go to the Foreign Ministry, I'd get tarted up and go. August 3rd, Friday, *Shredding continues apace. We destroy all of the POL files, great feeling of freedom.*

I remember I marked down the cables. *We get a call to come to the MFA at noon on August 6th. I go with Joe to the Presidency. We sit around for an hour. Sa'dun Hammudi wanders up and down the hall. We meet him on the steps of the Presidency as we leave to go back to the Foreign Ministry. Here we meet Saddam, presidency people. Two hour meeting. We return to embassy at 4:00 p.m.. Joe calls in results. I type notes on computer. Joe does a quick cable. I do verbatim cable. TV shows us meeting Saddam. Get home early, 3:00 a.m. -ish.* I don't know what to do with these wonderful little notes.

Q: Well it gives a feel for that. We will pick this up the next time. You have notes and I'd like you to read that into the tape and then we'll go on . . .

This is the 25th of January 2008. Nancy when we were cut off last time. We were going to go back to the notes you were taking. So I'll leave it to you to explain what you were doing and all.

JOHNSON: Okay. On August 2, 1990 I was Political Chief. Joe Wilson was the Charge. The Ambassador was on leave. All the ambassadors were on leave." (I think I explained that.) [reading from journal in italics] *06:20. Joe calls, says I'd better get in ASAP. Iraqi troops have invaded Kuwait. The day spent organizing crisis management. We begin shredding. Command center set up in Joe's office. John DeCarlo* (who was the Region Security Officer) *says we have orders to get to one half hour burn and, at the end of the day, down to a ten minute burn, so we just get rid of the files! Ardith* (Ambassador Glaspie's secretary) *came back to work after her three months of leave and pitched right in.* Cables I wrote were: *Baghdad 4411 on the border closing at 10 a.m*. and "*Baghdad 4413 and 4440 Iraqis being told to leave Baghdad and an evacuation trial run. Consular was busy contacting American citizens (Baghdad 4421). The GOI* (Government of Iraq) *moving temporary resident foreigners to five star hotels*.

Friday, August 3rd. Shredding continues apace. We destroy <u>all</u> of POL files--great feeling of freedom. The noise of shredders is background for all events. Marines do it. They bring a shredder from upstairs to the second deck so two are going at once. Joe Wilson is in and out, meetings with Nizar Hamdoon and with the diplomatic corps. Melvin Ang (my deputy) *and I decide to do split shifts. I do 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. He does 9:00 or 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. This soon breaks down as Joe has us doing things at the same time. American citizens begin to come out of the woodwork to register. Consular Officers get in touch with all those who are registered. I go with Joe to the MFA at midnight for a demarche on missing American citizens Baghdad 4469.*

August 4, Saturday. Somewhere in here we set up fifteen minute phone checks on the open STU III line to Washington. American citizen businessmen and people up from Kuwait held in Rashid Hotel are of great concern. We institute nightly meeting with businessmen in the Embassy. Consular officers visit hotels nightly, give and take messages, get more names of people who are there. The GOI is trying to jam VOA and the BBC. Cables for that day were Baghdad 4469 and 4483.

August 5, Sunday. I did sitreps (Baghdad 4495) in the morning and in the afternoon (4522). Mel meets with missing Amcits up from Kuwait at the Rashid. The memorial service for Frank Lisi. (I forgot somewhere in this to put that he was a communicator who dropped dead. He had a heart attack. We had a memorial service for him in the middle of all this.) *Philip Coggin comes over* (I think he was from the Canadian Embassy, but I can't remember) *and Mel and I give him information on GOI grain imports.*

August 6, Monday. In normal early time. We get a call for Joe to come to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at noon. I go with. First to the Presidency. We sit around for an hour. Sa'dun Hammudi wanders up and down the hall. (He was a senior official in the Foreign Ministry.) *We meet him on the steps of the Presidency as we leave to go back to the MFA. There we meet Saddam Hussein, Tariq Aziz and Nizar Hamdoon, various Presidency people for a two hour meeting. We return to the embassy 4:00 p.m. Joe calls in results. I type my notes on the computer. Joe does a quick quote cable. We do verbatim cable. TV*

shows us meeting Saddam. Get home early, 3:00 a.m.-ish. Baghdad 4528 and 4545. More rumors about who can leave and what borders are open--false.

Tuesday, August 7. 06:30 go in. General meeting. Joe announces who will be going on second tranche. I am included without consultation. Beard Joe for explanation, get sexist one. Do sit rep (Baghdad 4577). Go home early to begin to pack. Hard to decide what to put in air freight especially not knowing if permission has been granted. Dither making piles. Circa 9:30 call Embassy get Joe who says no permission, so I go to bed. I get involved trying to get access to an eleven year old girl, Penny Nabokov, at the Melia Hotel. The MFA are all very sympathetic and helpful. Penny was on a BA flight that stopped to refuel in Kuwait on August 2nd and was unaccompanied. Mother is in India. Father in USA. Alf (Cooley, a retired consular officer helping out for the summer) *goes over to see her and has lunch with her. Later she is moved to the Rashid and then sprung to overnight with Angs. Dependents and nonessentials gathered at the Embassy this morning sent home as there was no permission for them to leave. Did a cable with Mel on Americans from Kuwait now at the Rashid (Baghdad 4592). Embassy's air conditioning frozen.*

August 8, Wednesday. Slowish day, deflated feeling that all 29 aren't going tomorrow. Baghdad 4600: air freight stuff distributed to all homes. Jim Ritchie's (the Defense Attache) *car messed with so now all park inside bollards, later inside the compound. 8:00 p.m. Saddam Hussein's message on Victory Day. Also Baghdad 4608.*

August 9, Thursday, Week 2. 06:07 convoy sets off for Jordan, continuation of shredding. Baghdad 4635 and 4664. Afternoon, Bob Love, John DeCarlo and Lee Hess paint second deck windows white (to give us privacy so no one in surroundings buildings can look in. It is weird to be in a room with white windows so you can get light but you can't see out.) *Lilli Van Laningham calls from border. They had been stopped. Won't be allowed through.* (Lilli was the wife of the Admin Counselor, Jim Van Laningham.) *After four hours they head back. Joe is not in the office. They call from Rutba. 9:00 a.m. Joe makes demarche to Nizar Hamdoon, both exhausted. Nizar says the convoy can go and take Penny with them. I called my folks in the morning. Penny in office helping Mitsy Eustis* (wife of one of the communicators*). Mel gets bright idea to put her to work in the Consular section. Penny and Bob Sage shred bio files. New Government of Kuwait asks to join Iraq. GOI says all foreign embassies in Kuwait must close doors by August 24th.*

August 10, Friday. In at 6:30. Rose on phone, exhausted. Learn more about incident last night. J.C. explodes at (I can't remember person whose initials are here) *unwarranted. Real anger at Joe's wife for the way she behaved.* (I have no recollection of this at all.)

Slow day. Charlie and Col Ritchie sleep most of it, in and out of the office. Mary DeCarlo organizes a picnic in the ambassador's office, grill on balcony outside Joe's office. Most go home early to catch up on sleep. Long talk with Howard. (I can't remember who Howard is.) *6:00 p.m. home, talk with Sages across the back wall, they loan me camera so I can photograph all my stuff. Realized I have to bid on '92 LDP so call into the task force and asked to speak with an FSO and get the Ambo who will help. It was really nice*

to talk with her. She says tape of Joe and me with Saddam played on British television. Called Cramers in the morning. Penny Nabokov is here now, since yesterday. She's staying with the Angs. They've put her to work in Consular session. She'll go with the convoy tomorrow. Saddam Hussein's wild speech read, followed by mosque calls, equally inflammatory. I went to bed. It feels like Gotterdammerung.

August 11, Saturday. 03:30. Convoy sets out again after Saddam Hussein's speech. I get into office at 06:30, talk with Rose and Charlie and take over as phone monitor from Rose. Baghdad 4680, 4685.

*Began this book today, so am having a bit of trouble reconstructing the early phases of this operation. We are all operating on too little sleep or sleep that is broken up. It's better now but the first few days were killers. Steve Thibalt (*of USIS) *has taken over press report. 11:45 good meeting of all with Joe in the chair. 12:30 p.m. Joe going home to rest. Orders to let him know anything from Amman so he can call the Department. He says, 'It's my deal.' All other information has to be passed immediately. 2:00 p.m. Waiting to hear news of our convoy, very quiet in Embassy. Jim Van Laningham and Steve Thibeault have set up T.V. in Mel's office. Some Marines now watching. 15:00. Just got word they passed the Iraqi border! 17:30. Had champagne to celebrate crossing. Great relief among guys whose wives were on the convoy. Head home after the 18:00 business man's meeting began, made a cake, bed.*

August 12, Sunday. Baghdad 4690, 4707. 05:00. Eight hours sleep--wonderful. Found I'd left the oven on all night and had forgotten to cover the cake which I iced. Wear sloppy clothes to office where I have two dresses, shoes, tights if I need to go anywhere. We are all doing that. 06:30 Office. We have lost secure line, indeed any line to D.C.. International operators try to get us one. Did the sitrep after interesting talk with Adnan Saadi (the Political Section's FSN) *on his conversations over the weekend. Disturbing. 11:30 Joe tells me we are off to the MFA for a noon meeting with Nizar Hamdoon et al. I come back and do the cables, then edit a piece on Saddam Hussein's appeal for austerity, then read traffic and prepare next sitrep. Saddam Hussein will give another speech tonight--an initiative! Tired despite the eight hours, something to do with tension. Joe will show "Lawrence of Arabia" tonight. Ironically, the only picture in the Wang room is of Cyrus Vance.* (Vance was the Secretary of State at the time of the Iran hostage crisis and I think resigned after the botched rescue attempt. Here we were in a situation where American diplomats could again be hostages.) *Seidel read Vienna Convention, amid laughter. 6:30 p.m. Waiting for Saddam's next speech. Great initiative. Ten minutes long. Scare of demonstration turns out to be RSO misreading some kind of drill. We do short cable on Saddam Hussein's three-point plan, then home in convoy with Bob Love and Bob Sage. Until midnight packed air freight, second suitcase.*

Monday, August 13. Got up late, left $50 for Cora (the maid I shared with the Commercial Officer.) *Typed up my air freight inventories. Bob Love will pick it up today. 9:00 staff meeting. Looks like it will be a quiet day, so I'll take it easy, maybe go home. 12:00. Finished sitrep. We had a demonstration with about fifty, chanting and presenting a petition. 12:30. Talked to Georgia DeBell* (in the Department) *about GOI statement on*

travel. CNN implying that people can go via Saudi Arabia -- not true. Will call 'Ijam in half an hour to clarify and tell Georgia. She says Brad and Debbie are fine. (They were fellow FSOs, in Yemen at the time.) *1:45 p.m. Col. Ritchie okays sitrep (Baghdad 4725) as no Joe or Jim Van Laningham around. Joe comes in. I talk to 'Ijam and that plus dip note becomes cable. 4:30 Call folks, Ma sounds near tears. At least they know I might be coming out. Ardith also noticed abolition of chain of command and my going as female. 'If Haywood were here,' she said, 'he'd never go.' I tell her to raise it in D.C. 18:30. Got the second sit rep in (Baghdad 4750). 19:10. Waiting for the Secretary of State to call. Joe at his usual EC plus meeting, me to talk with the Secretary. 20:30. Still no Secretary and chances are he won't make it. James Tansley stopped by and we had a natter.* (Tansley was a British diplomat.) *21:00. Joe calls in, going to the MFA at 10:00. Alf comes and reads messages from Rashid people home—very touching.* (These were messages from American citizens who were held at the Hotel Rashid.) *22:00. We lost the line to D.C. and at that moment the Secretary came by, so I'm off to bed.*

Tuesday, August 14. 13:00. Busy morning. Called on Swiss for very interesting conversation duly reported. No news yet on whether we'll be allowed to go. 4:30 p.m. Steve Thibeault rushes in with news that Iraqi Airways is flying tomorrow, rushes out and books 19 seats. Charlie S, Rose, Bob Love and I natter a while and I come home about 7 p.m. Do my laundry. Have a chat with Bob Sage over the wall and get a case of Pepsi he bought me at the coop. Spend evening writing checks to close out the accounts. (I was the president and nominal treasurer of the Embassy employees' food coop. I had to return to people what they had put in, their original investments, which I did. I brought the check book out and after everyone was paid, we left the money in an account in the Department to be used to start up another coop when we returned to Baghdad.) *10:30 p.m. Jim Van Laningham calls, to say be in the Embassy at 06:30 a.m., with suitcase, passport, etc. We're going by air, maybe. I pack cases, putting papers in my carry-on. Will wear a dress in case we go all the way home. Alarms set for 4:30 a.m. Ted Koppel's in town.*

Wednesday, August 15. 04:30. Rise, pack, put stuff in the car, leave note and money for Cora and drive into work, to discover that Ardith was given permission to stay. Makes me feel more and more as if it's a problem between Joe and me. 08:00 Jim Van Laningham and Steve go to Iraqi Air. They refuse to sell tickets to us. 10:00 a.m. Joe and I go to Wikri (at the Foreign Ministry*) where we get a dip note on Kuwaiti assets and learn his view that we're here as long as there is a threat to Bagdad. Back to do lots of cables (Baghdad 4817) 16:00. Got cables done, read a pile of traffic. Looked at job lists—not much in '92 except DCM Sanaa and Muscat! Joe asks Mel and me to do demarche on sick kids after 7 so I read background. Ted Koppel and crew are here now. They came in last night on an Iraqi Air flight, spent five hours in the Defense Attaché's office on the phone. Geez. 1800. Koppel went off to interview Tariq Aziz for a live broadcast. We provided a link between the TV studio here and London with Mary diCarlo talking to Simon in ABC London and Lee to 'Terry'. It was a hoot. Off at 9:15 with Mel to make a demarche on two sick American citizens. Picked up one suitcase and came home and unpacked a bit. Very tired. People were disappointed we didn't get out. I am satisfied to stay. I have work to do, but some don't and are getting restless. Mel said he will always*

remember my 7 a.m. August 2 call, 'You'd better come in. We have a bit of a problem,' he says I said. Probably did."

Thursday, August 16th, Week Three. Someone was trying to jam BBC. Back to sloppy clothes for office. We should have Dan Rather today. 16:00. Busy day. Did sitrep (Baghdad 4844). Got involved in a consular problem when Robin rang to say they have been barred access to hotel detainees. Alf goes off to Rashid and says same thing for him. I tell Robin, and try to get MFA explanation. None until tonight. Dan Rather was here. Took him five hours to get out of the airport, so Steve T explained why: Diane Sawyer cutting didn't go down well. (Diane Sawyer had interviewed Saddam and had truncated the interview, and the Iraqis were really annoyed.) *Lilli Van Laningham manning the phones in D.C. Nice to hear her. They are going to put our mail into NEA/EX. Joe will host a hamburger and beer bash for businessmen at the Residence tonight. I am going to Pappenfuss at 8, except not now. Saddam Hussein is delivering verbal letters to Britain on TV, and I need to cover that. 21:00 Saddam Hussein's speech had English subtitles so our effort was wasted! Joe came in. No luck with Nizar Hamdoon, still no 'new rules' for diplomats. Our Rashid group* (of American citizens) *has been moved--we don't know where yet. 22:30. Home at 10 p.m. Didn't go to Pappenfuss. Very tired. Will sleep until I wake up. Lee says my Collin Street order arrived. Will tell the task force to let my folks or Dwight pick up my mail.*

Friday, August 17. 06:40. Woke up after a good sleep, but still not enough. Will go in by 8 a.m. 08:00 Odd sort of day, very groggy. We had the 9 a.m. meeting without Joe, Jim Van Laningham in the chair. Was working on the sitrep, when Joe said he wanted some political reporting on UNIMOG, so I went to see the Canadians who had nothing, tried and failed to get the Political Advisor (day off), dashed over to the MFA to deliver a note, did sitrep (Baghdad 4906), ready to go home—after calling the folks and asking them to cancel Phillip Morris—when Joe called, wanting Mel to go with him and me to stay here and try to get him an appointment with 'Ijam. Then I'll go home. I am worried about Ma. This is awfully hard on her. Thank God, Peggy is okay but they took the works. Hope all it was was fibroids. 7:00 p.m. Trying to get 'Ijam's office. 8:00 p.m. 'Ijam's office—not at MFA, then call and find out Joe and MFA have been in direct touch. Watching TV news, Dan Rather comes in, a very pleasant, interesting guy. Steve T and I talk with him for an hour or so. Joe comes in, no joy from 'Ijam. I come home and cook a meal. Watched Chinese TV series dubbed in English with Arabic subtitles. It's about a bunch of just men 1000 years ago who become outlaws and set out to overthrow tyrants, arguing the idea that good men plus the people <u>can</u> overthrow tyrants! And no one in the GOI has noticed. Followed by two foreign series 'Petrocell' and 'Flying Doctors' from Australia.

August 18, Saturday. 06:00 BBC new carries Sali Mahdi Salah's announcement that foreigners will be put at key installations and bases to ensure the safety of the places. So far no dips as the GOI has plenty of other cannon fodder. 15:30. My morning was spent sorting out the GOI's policy, reporting to DC, talking with two Bechtel guys who are told the policy will affect them. (Baghdad 4919) Talked with the Ambo and told her about the Cy Vance picture and Chinese TV show. Nice to have her there for us and do I wish she were here! It gets quiet this time of day between shifts in D.C., MFA at home resting and

eating, so I read cable traffic. Joe just got a call to call Hamdoon. Mary diCarlo is pregnant and wants special permission to leave. Don't know whether Joe will even ask. Hamdoon said dips could fly out by Iraqi Air to Amman. Steve T is off to make 19 reservations. Returns with news Iraqi Air won't accept our reservations! Jim Van Laningham also putting in request by land for next Tuesday. Upshot, we requested travel Tuesday. Called Hilary Ames and Ren and Bowen. Eileen has an answering machine, so I left a message. (All friends in England.) *Came home at 7:30 p.m., cooked, made a cake. Watched news—report on AIDS among US GI's in Saudi Arabia.*

August 19, Sunday. Baghdad 4932 and 4953. 7:00. Woke up an hour ago, listened to BBC news and then got up. Now listening again and will go in at about 7:30. Wally (Eustis, a communicator) *isn't there until 8 so nothing to read. 13:00. There was activity last night. At 11:30, it was decided to move American citizens from major hotels to the Residence so the consular officers worked hard.* (To preempt the GOI from using them as human shields.) *Today, some are gathering food from the empty houses to bring to a central commissary. When people leave (!), stuff from our houses will be sold too. Jim R organized the Bechtel guys at the residence. On travel, JVL bought tickets for the 22nd just as Iraqi Air manager said no tickets to American diplomats. We should get travel permission tomorrow and if so will leave in the early hours of the 21st. We shall see. Meanwhile, quiet reigns. Just learned Jordan has closed the border. Not feeling good so went home at 5, made ice cream, dinner, bed after TV new—two announcements—at 9:30. Did laundry too.*

Monday, August 20th. Baghdad 4987 and 4995. 06:00 woke, listened to BBC news. 09:00 meeting. Mitzi complained about not being told we're going early the 21st. We don't know yet, so no point in worrying. Went over to the German Embassy to draft talkers for a German/French/British/US demarche to Aziz. As I was going, saw busses of young pioneers gathering by Iraqi Meets. Traffic jammed. On the way home, James Tansley couldn't get through, so I walked home through the kids waiting to demonstrate. They did at 11:00. 13:30. Word comes that we have travel permission—road, via Jordan. My car is on the list so gave keys to Abbas (motorpool FSN*) for them to check it over. I'll have two Marines as passengers. Bob Sage takes me home and I pack, clean up kitchen, do laundry, sleep from 8 to 11 p.m. The up and at 12:30 with Bob to Embassy where we mill around for an hour. Joe gives us a pep talk and we set off at 2:15 a.m., August 21st.*

August 21st, Tuesday. See cable describing our journey. Arrived Amman. Ambassador met us and there was Janet Sanderson (who had brought a bottle of Scotch!) Had an hour to get cleaned up for briefing. Out tomorrow a.m. to London then D.C. Janet and I went out to dinner at Chinese restaurant, I using per diem to pay. Nice meal, lovely to see her. Back to hotel by 10. Called folks who were thrilled we were out. Began drafting cable. Then slept.

August 22nd, Wednesday. 06:30. Rose, showered, had breakfast in the room writing the cable. 07:30 Alf stopped by, hauled my luggage to the checkpoint. I wrote cable, read by Sage, diCarlo, others. RSO took it to POL for transmission today. Paid hotel bills, sat around.

10:00. Press photographed us getting on bus at the airport. That too will be on TV. Taken to the airport, wait in one room and do group photos under portrait of King Hussein. To another room and find three Iraqi generals sitting there. Eventually time to go. The five to Istanbul with animals and then home via Frankfurt or Paris to NYC, then DC. We 13 directly to London. They've sent us business class <u>all</u> the way! Nice. Flight pleasant. I sat with Bob Sage and we talked. Movie was Coupe de Ville. Good. We were met by AmEmbassy London people, brought to the hotel. Happily we are not a news story here. I got on the blower and called Dee, Kay Clark, Fanny, Eil (not home, left message). All so pleased I'm here. Got Eil at the office, she came to hotel and we had dinner. Bed by midnight, watching awful film on TV and ITN evening news.

August 23rd, Thursday. 05:00 Woke wide awake and got up. At 9 I'm going to be picked up and taken to the Embassy. Am worried about getting my luggage to the airport. 07:30 breakfast with Bob Love and Bob Sage. They promised to take my suitcases to the airport. 9:00 a.m. Car came, drove to Embassy through warm sunshine. Met with Desiree, Ross Rodgers, Bruce Burton and Charge, telling our tale and answering questions. Noonish off to the airport, met up with the gang and my luggage at PanAm. Checked in. Embassy got us into Clipper Club. On the plane, Fran wanted me to pick six to be upgraded. I let her do it. Sat with the Bobs. And that's where the diary ends.

Q: Couple questions. During the time you were _____ was there pretty much the feeling that . . . was going to do something? I mean, did that dawn on you or how did that come?

JOHNSON: No, there wasn't. We were hoping that something would be said. George Bush said something like, "This will not stand." But then there was nothing until Margaret Thatcher apparently came and stiffened him up. So we didn't know what our government was going to do.

Q: When it came time to split up, to have the chief political officer go out, did you feel this was a personality clash between you and Joe Wilson or was this because you are a woman or . . ?

JOHNSON: I think there were lots of different elements in it. Joe and I never had a clash in that sense. Early on in the crisis, I wrote a cable trying to explain why Saddam did what he did and how he misread the situation. Joe would not let me send it. I was only allowed to do sitreps. From his point of view, it was his show. It was very ironic that some three or four months later, the Agency did a report about why Saddam misjudged the situation. All the points that I made in the cable that was never sent were in the report. It wasn't the substance of it that was wrong. I don't know why but he didn't want it to go.

Q: Do you recall what your basic analysis was and why Saddam did it?

JOHNSON: He had misread our intentions. I don't remember all of it and that's too bad. I should have kept a copy of it. He had such a limited experience of the outside world. One of the things that I don't think he understood was that what he did in the invasion of

Kuwait would be a real threat to the international order in large part. That, if it were allowed to stand, then every small country with a big neighbor was in danger. I don't think he ever understood that that was going to be a factor in it when it all came down in the end. He was also very worried about us and our fleet. I think he assumed that because we didn't have a defense agreement with Kuwait, we would not come to Kuwait's defense.

Q: Of course, one of things I am still angry about . . . junior officer there . . . Iraq War. She had very poor contact with the Foreign Ministry. . . . People are afraid to tell Saddam things. So he was very badly informed about the world out there because if they told him the wrong thing he would lash out at them or kill them. This is one of the problems if you have sort of absolute dictator . . .

JOHNSON: We had fairly good relations with the Foreign Ministry, I think because Nizar Hamdoon had been ambassador here and had really loved his time here. So we had access. We were never turned down. I remember going to the Foreign Ministry and making a demarche and then we stepped into the hall and they would tell me things there because the room was bugged. If they wanted to say anything off the record, they would tell you outside the bugged room. People were always very gracious. It was not a happy place.

Q: The non embassy people, the Americans civilians, this would have been all sorts of attitudes . . .Did you get involved?

JOHNSON: Because I had never done consular work, I was not involved in that. I think they were alarmed. And, also alarmed, were American citizens who hadn't bothered to register, who had been living in Iraq for years. I think I told you, one of the sad things was shredding the passports of Americans who didn't want to have the passports around their houses. We shredded everything, just in case they came over the wall, there wouldn't be anything for them. The shredders were going full tilt, on and on. That produced bags and bags of rubbish. There was a space behind an outbuilding and a fence and that is where they took the shredded stuff and dumped it. It created a real mound.

Q: Was there concern that this time . . . were you burning the . . ?

JOHNSON: Shredding, not burning. The shredding was very, very fine. You couldn't put things together from that unless, well, it would be impossible. We all had far too much stuff in our files. The Defense Attaché's Office had three or four five-drawer safes full. That was several days' worth of shredding. One sadness was destroying April's lifetime of notes on the Palestinians. I think she was thinking of writing a book some day. They just shredded all that. In fact, we probably could have kept her notes, but we didn't know. We didn't know if we would be going out. We didn't know if we would become hostages. It was very tense.

Q: How about with the Foreign Service nationals? The Iraqis who were working for us? They were indispensable in the operation. How did you find them?

JOHNSON: They were terrific. They were all hard working. And Abbas, the man I mentioned, in 1967 he and fellow Kurds had personally driven all Americans' belongings out of Iraq into Iran for delivery to them at home at the time we were kicked out of the Middle East essentially after the June War of '67. He undertook to do that and then kept an eye on the Embassy property over the years. So we received real loyalty from people. The man who worked for me was retired from the military. He had a travel business. After the invasion, on the Friday, he came in slightly inebriated. He had been out drinking with his general buddies and came to say that the military was safe. I can't remember what I put in that cable except that I described it as 'disturbing" so it must have been a real eye opener into what the Iraqi military was planning and thinking. In the crisis, he was wonderful. He would go out and get information. He knew that he had to report what we were asking about. He was tailed. He probably had relations with the mukhabarat, he had to have. One of the problems we have in these kinds of countries is that everybody who worked for us had to report to somebody.

Q: There were a large group of foreign nationals . . .

JOHNSON: And, remember, not just the ones in Iraq. We had all the ones coming up from Kuwait. The people who came up in the first few days were oil workers. I'll never forget the story of one of them who had been up an oil rig early on the morning of August 2nd. He heard this noise and looked up to see Iraqi helicopters coming at eye height. We had a bunch of these oil people and electrical engineers, and then we got people from our Embassy in Kuwait. The Iraqis declared Kuwait to be the nineteenth province. They said to our people in Kuwait, the government of Kuwait doesn't exist anymore as a separate entity, therefore your diplomatic immunity doesn't apply and we don't recognize you as diplomats. We were all deeply concerned about what would happen to our colleagues from Embassy Kuwait. The people who came up from Kuwait were stuck in Iraq until everybody left in January 1991.

Q: You came back to Washington?

JOHNSON: Yes, I was only here for three or four days. April had arranged for me to do a TDY (temporary duty) in Bahrain because Bahrain was short handed and it was central to what was happening. I got on a plane and went off to Bahrain.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about your . . .

JOHNSON: It would have been September '90 to December '90.

Q: What was the situation in Bahrain when you were there, because this is . . I mean by the time you got there was the 82nd Airborne, had we put Airborne into Saudi Arabia at that point?

JOHNSON: Yes, we were moving into Saudi Arabia and there were a lot of military people from the Coalition. I can remember I was there to help out with a Naval

Conference, called to de-conflict things. When you have 16 navies from all over the world operating in a small place like the Gulf, you have to work out how to talk to each other, who will do what and so on. I helped set the Conference up. I had never seen as much brass in my life as all these admirals hats. I think the ambassador didn't have an awful lot of confidence in his political officer, who was excellent, a really sharp guy.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

JOHNSON: I have forgotten his name and also the name of the young political officer. The latter's nose was a little out of joint when I came, as I realized it was going to be. So I said, 'You are the boss here. I am just here to help you out.' We established that relationship and then worked very well together. He was a very bright young fellow, but the ambassador for some reason just didn't have a lot of confidence in him.

It was a busy Embassy and there were more and more things happening. Everybody was stretched and pushed, as usual in a crisis.

Q: I went a little back . . . What was your impression of the media when it arrived? Ted Koppel, Dan Rather, but others? Because this was a war that ended up being reported from both sides of the . . When the war was on you had CNN sitting and watching the bombing. At your time, talking to the people, were they getting the story right?

JOHNSON: They were. They came in without a lot of knowledge but they were very good about asking questions and getting background information fast. They were quick studies. They would come and often ask questions about what they had been told because they didn't want to make mistakes on the air. I think the story about Dan Rather was he is hard of hearing. Ted Koppel didn't stay around too long, but Bob Simon came and spent quite a lot of time while I was still there. There were meetings with these press guys as well with the businessmen. There was a lot of pooling of information.

Q: Bob Simon, if I recall, became sort of infamous within the military because he ended up, he was from what I gather, coming out of the Vietnam generation. You know, sort of disparaging the military and all that. But then he got captured . . . Was he the one that got captured?

JOHNSON: No, it was Dan Rather. It might have been the two of them. But this was after my time. They went on an expedition on their own. They were told not to. This was when the war was just about to begin. They went to Kuwait from Saudi Arabia and got captured. I think they were released in fairly short order.

Q: I think it was Bob Simon. If I recall, I think it was some of our people in Saudi Arabia were gritting their teeth because they felt, "Let the guy rot." But they went and made . .

JOHNSON: Whatever, we have to do our jobs. A lot of people came after I left, so I missed any hard feelings.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Bahrain government or the state in Bahrain or were you pretty much up to your neck in military?

JOHNSON: No, we were constantly working with them and they were really helpful. It's a lovely island and it was a really nice TDY. The Foreign Minister is a sweetheart. It's funny, in reviewing the volume of the Foreign Relations of the United States for the Arabian peninsula from 1973-1976, the Foreign Minister, Sheik Mohammed, was a pain in the patoosh in those days. But by 1991 he was really helpful. It was just a really nice place to be, a very laid back place. I left because I was only there on a TDY. The Bahrain-Qatar Desk Officer got an assignment to Egypt, via six months of refresher Arabic training. They asked me if I would come and be the Desk Officer for six months, and that is what I did.

Q: So you went down to Qatar?

JOHNSON: I went to Qatar for just a couple of days. Mark Hambley was the ambassador there and took me all around. There were a lot of American service people in Qatar at that time, maybe five or six hundred at the base. Every week he had 25 of them over for an evening at his house. And, Mark Hambley is a really funny guy, really entertaining fellow. We played team croquet and he kept changing the rules so it was rather like the Mad Hatter's croquet party. Everybody put their name on a slip of paper in a hat and, as the guest from overseas, I got to pull a name out of the hat. That person got to call home. The Hambleys had a dog. There was one young soldier who spent the whole evening playing with the dog. His sergeant told me later that he really worried about this fellow and that that evening with the dog was all that he needed. He had a dog at home and he really missed his dog. The young woman who called home came back in tears but it meant so much to her. It was a really nice thing for the Hambleys to do once a week.

Q: How do you spell the name?

JOHNSON: H-a-m-b-l-e-y. And, Mark had wonderful, wonderful Arabic.

Q: Is he retired?

JOHNSON: Yes, yes I think so. I remember him telling me about going on his first tour. He was on a plane that was hijacked. He had adventures.

Q: What was your impression of Qatar? I have to say that in my day, we are talking about the 1950's, Qatar and Bahrain were all part of the _____ Consular District and I was vice consular there.

JOHNSON: So you got to travel?

Q: So I used to go through there. And Qatar of course had something like 20 miles of paved road. The tallest building in the place was a clock tower which they were very proud of.

JOHNSON: It has developed. It's very sophisticated. I am a philatelist, stamp collector, and they have the most wonderful post office that looks like a pigeon coop with lots of circular windows. From a distance it looks like a pigeon coop. It is very funny when you think about it for a post office. Qatar was very well organized with lots of big shiny hotels. It was booming.

Q: What were you doing?

JOHNSON: In Qatar, I was on an orientation trip. I had a couple of days to make sense of it. Then I came home and was in Arabian Peninsula Affairs as the Desk Officer for Bahrain and Qatar from January 1991 to August 1991 when I went on.

Q: So you were there on the war . . ?

JOHNSON: Yes, we did the war. I will never forget, I was living on 21st street in a building where I owned an apartment. Mine was rented, so I rented another one. I was talking to my mother and watching the evening news when all this news was coming out of Baghdad. I said, 'Surely the war hasn't started.' By God, it was the beginning of the war. We knew something was about to happen but we didn't know when it was. We left the office that day not knowing that the war had begun.

Q: You were the desk officer for Bahrain and Qatar, not the United Emirates?

JOHNSON: No, they had their own Desk Office. Kuwait had its own Desk Officer. That came from the days of the Iran/Iraq War when they were reflagging ships. Kuwait had become a very busy and demanding desk. And, of course, Saudi Arabia had its own Desk Officer, as did the UAE and Oman. I guess Bahrain and Qatar were combined because they were at each other's throats.

Q: While you were doing this, did the specter of the Shias in Bahrain and the Iranian . . . this was back in my time in the 50's, we were really concerned about, we were as concerned about the Bahrains. We were very concerned about the Iranian influx, legal and illegal, into that island. Was this a concern at the time?

JOHNSON: I didn't get a sense that it was. I think there is always some concern about Shia because, of course, they were the majority while the rulers were Sunni. They turned out to be extremely loyal. During the war, from Washington's point of view, we were just doing a lot of coordination with the Defense Department and asking governments to do things to make the lives of our troops out there better.

Q: How did you find the U.S. military and the central command meshed with these two small states?

JOHNSON: That's a hard one. The military had its requirements and they usually got what they wanted, especially in war time. There were then problems after the war. Well,

not problems but . . . I was continuing the efforts of my predecessor to get a Status of Forces agreement with, I think it was Qatar. We didn't have one. In the course of the war I was pushing paper to see if this would happen. It never did. Of course when the war was over the Qataris weren't nearly as keen to do it as they had been in January 1991, so it never happened. It was really kind of a temporary thing.

Q: As the war went, basically as the war was over so quickly, was there a feeling from you and your fellow people that maybe it stopped too soon or that Saddam would survive. What was the general feeling or your feeling?

JOHNSON: My feeling was that George Bush the elder was absolutely correct to stop where he did because if he had gone into Bagdad it would have destroyed the Coalition and the whole strength of our position was the Coalition. The Coalition was, in many ways, politically fragile. It took a lot of nurturing. Having got all these things through the U.N. and having set the parameters, to destroy them to go in and get Saddam would have been very difficult to do. It would have been a disaster in many ways. I thought well, "It's up to Saddam to see if he survives or not."

Q: I interviewed David Mack who was had that area. {?}

JOHNSON: He was the DAS, yes.

Q: And so he was a . . of people of similar responsibilities. And, somebody raised the question, "What if Saddam survives?" And there was general laughter. Sort of the feeling that, "He won't go." But you, you were closer to the, I mean you had an Iraqi frame of reference.

JOHNSON: I think that people probably laughed because in the course of things in any other country in the world, anybody who had taken his country to two wars and managed to lose both of them wasn't going to survive. It was just amazing that Saddam did. It was a measure of how tight that regime was and, maybe, we've lifted up the rocks recently and found out what was going on, how difficult the divisions in that country are. Iraqis could have taken a long look at that and decided the evil they knew was better than what might come after it. And they would have been quite right.

Q: How aware were you at the time of the divisions within Iraq when you were there? Did you have the feeling it wouldn't take much to put all the Sunnis and Shias and various tribes against each other?

JOHNSON: It is amazing how the tribal element is very difficult for Westerners to pick up on. In the countryside Iraq is very tribal, apparently. Everywhere we went we had to get permission. We didn't wander around the countryside. We were very conscious of the Kurdish independence sentiments and the fact that the United States had done deals with Barzani and Talabani and others over the years. The Kurds could break off. The Shias in the south had proved to be loyal during the Iran/Iraq War so we didn't have any expectation that the country would break up. It was still fragile.

Q: Outside of the Status of Forces Agreement with Qatar, any other issues that you were having to deal with with Bahrain or Qatar at the time?

JOHNSON: I can't remember anything else. It was just the general run of the mill desk officer sort of stuff. People coming into the office, letters to Congressman, getting visas, talking to businessmen. Run of the mill.

Q: Where did you go after that?

JOHNSON: I went to the job I thought I always wanted, it was the NEA watcher in London. As David Mack said to me, it had to be somebody at grade with NEA experience who had just come off a really tough year. And he said nobody touched me for that one. So I went to London to be the Middle East watcher. That was fascinating.

Q: What times were you there?

JOHNSON: I was there from August 1991. I did it for two and half years and then I started to miss the challenge of being in the trenches, in a difficult or dangerous situation somewhere. I bid on and got the job as the POL Chief in Algiers via six months of French training. I am probably the only person on record who curtailed out of London, but I spent 13 years there as a student and so I knew England.

Q: Let's talk about a bit about the embassy and how you fit in. Who was the ambassador?

JOHNSON: The ambassador was Ray Seitz, who was wonderful, a career diplomat -- the only career diplomat ever to be Ambassador to the Court of Saint James. The first week, I was sent in to say hello to him. I asked him how long he'd been in England. He said he had been there as a junior officer, as head of the political section and then he was there as DCM and then ambassador. I asked him how many years he was there and he said, "About ten." I said, "Well, you are just a relative newcomer. I was here for thirteen." We got on very well. I think I made him laugh. I was so impressed with him. One day he had to talk with the BBC about a Middle East issue and I went and briefed him. Then I listened to him. He came to see me afterwards and asked how it had gone. I said, "I would have thought you'd been dealing with this issue your whole life." He was very bright, very able, a smooth operator and an awfully nice fellow.

The head of the political section was Bruce Burton another wonderful guy. It was a really nice section. I did the Middle East only and had no responsibility for domestic British politics. Mike McKinley did Africa and the Liberal Democrats. Asian issues were done by Larry Robinson, who also did the Conservatives, I think. There was one man who did all of the defense stuff.

Q: _____?

JOHNSON: We had a young officer who did things like U.N. and extraneous things. For a while we had Avriham Ramey, a blind officer, who spent a year or two years in London. He also did assorted issues, too. There are moments I treasure and will always remember. I came in late one morning because I had to go to the dentist. I found all my colleagues standing around the central desk waiting for me. It was the day after the Israelis had moved 400 Palestinians out of Israel in December into no man's land between Israel and Lebanon, where they had no food or shelter. The demarche I had to make was essentially saying the Israelis did the right thing. My colleagues were waiting to say, "Rather you than me, mate." I went over to the Foreign Office and I saw a really nice man. I began by saying, "My country. . ," because I had been instructed to make the following demarche. After I finished, he said to me, "Well, Nancy, I have heard worse. Not often. But I have heard worse." And he gave me a reply. That was the only time in my career that it was personally embarrassed to carry my government's message. Our relations with the Brits were wonderful. Sometimes I would get a call first thing in the morning from somebody from the Foreign Office, saying, "You're going to have instructions to make a demarche on blah, blah, blah. Come see me at 10:00. We'll have a reply ready." They had been given a heads up by the Middle-East watcher at the British Embassy here. I would go in and make my demarche and they would give me their answer. Sometimes, they would actually give me the cable. I think you know it's a very special relationship. Even if Presidents and Prime Ministers are not talking, the munchkin level is very busy. Whatever the issue, we cooperate, we work very well on taxes, if its legal issues, immigration, drugs, you name it.

Q: What were some of the things you handled.

JOHNSON: I was standing on the bus this morning trying to remember. The war in Iraq was over so it was essentially a very quiet period. Frankly, I can't remember. I got to do all kinds of things and meet all sorts of interesting people. I became a member of Chatham House, the Royal Institute for International Affairs, and went to lectures there. I met all kinds of interesting people, but, I can't remember anything really outstanding. I'm sorry.

Q: Did you feel the United States was too supportive of Israel compared to the _____? I mean, was this a particular issue?

JOHNSON: No, everybody knew where we stood. We didn't fight about these things. We cooperated on an awful lot of issues. I was there for the election of --it was after Margaret Thatcher left. I guess it would have been 1992-93. We had a pool with various people at the Foreign Office about who was going to win, how many votes, what have you. An old friend from my boarding school days was married to a Member of Parliament. One day I went campaigning with him in his constituency, just standing back and looking to see what he did. I got a lot of information from him and I told my colleagues that the Tories were going to win and win by 23. On the day of the election, the Embassy reported that the Tories were going to win, but fudged the issue of size of the victory. My predictions were right on. Bruce came into my office and said, "I just got a call from the Assistant

Secretary of State who congratulated the Embassy on getting in right. I told him, the only person who got the numbers right was the damn Middle East expert."

It was also the time of the Madrid Conference.

Q: This was taking advantage of the aftermath of the Gulf War to talk about things between the Palestinians and the Israelis and also to follow through on the Oslo Accords.

JOHNSON: We had all the back and forth about details of the Madrid Conference. As a result of that, I got to meet Hanan Ashrawi. We were making contact with the Palestinians.

Q: Yes, because she was a spokeswoman for . . .

JOHNSON: For years we were not allowed to meet with Palestinians. It was our policy not to meet with the PLO and Hannan was in London on some business. I had to deliver a message from Jim Baker. Then there was one memorable occasion when Bruce came into my office and said, "The Secretary wants to talk with Prince Bandar." Bandar was the Saudi Ambassador to this country for a long time. He was in London where his daughter was going to school. Bruce said, "He is coming in tonight so you get to wait." I waited and Bandar drove into the Embassy. I met him down in the garage and escorted him up to Bruce's office. Bruce is a Redskin fan. In his office he had Redskin pennants and all kinds of paraphernalia -- team pictures, cups and what have you. Bandar walked in and said, "I am a Cowboys fan." We had set up the call with Washington. I had to call into the Secretary's office when Bandar was in Bruce's office and it all worked. I walked out the door as Bandar was saying, "Hi Jim, it's Bandar." He wrote a note to Bruce saying, "I'm a Cowboys fan. Thanks for the use of your phone." He was involved in the negotiations leading up to Madrid. We had endless senior people passing through all the time.

Q: I have to agree with Admiral Crowe. He said, "I felt like a travel agent more than anything else." All these people coming through.

JOHNSON: And, if it was a Middle East person, I met them and arranged their program of visits, the cars, the hotel, the whole bit with the help of a wonderful woman called Fran who worked in the Embassy for years. There was a conference in London at Lancaster House as part of the Madrid process. We had six senior people from the department. Afterwards, my secretary said, "I have never seen anything like this. We ran six separate schedules." Sometimes these people got together and were at the same meeting and sometimes they were doing their own thing. They had meetings in their hotel and in the Embassy. At one point we had people in three or four different rooms in the Embassy. Among the six people were Dan Kurtzer and Ed Djerejian, senior management of NEA. Organizing the schedules was very complicated. I didn't go to the meetings.

Q: You mentioned Fran. Would you talk a bit about . . She died not too long ago. She was an _____ with an English woman. Could you talk about her a bit?

JOHNSON: She was in the admin. section and she was a facilitator. She made hotel reservations. She was a real pro. She could get tickets for anything. She helped with scheduling. She was one of those really valuable people. She and the young woman who was the Ambassador's social secretary put together dinner parties and other events. I don't think the Embassy could have functioned without either of them. I only had dealings with Fran and her assistants when I had visitors, but she was wonderful. She would say, "Don't put them in that hotel, put them in this one because its more convenient to blah, blah, blah." She had been at the Embassy for a while.

It was a strange embassy because it had a pub in the basement. It had a cafeteria, but it also had a pub. British people like their pint at lunchtime and the pub served beer. It was a bar, which was rather nice actually. You could go and have a pub lunch instead of the standard cafeteria fare.

Q: Did you get any feel, obviously you had had your time, your thirteen or so years before, but did you see a change in the official . . in other words was the foreign ministry getting more democratic or was it still sort of a rather precious group of people? I don't use this as a bad term.

JOHNSON: Oh, I know. I think that I was surprised there were a number of women in senior positions, desk officers. The Iraq desk officer was a young woman with whom I dealt all the time. In that sense, it was probably changing slowly. Early on in my tenure, Bruce took me to lunch with the equivalent of the Assistant Secretary for the Middle East. As we came back into the Foreign Office we walked down a corridor and I said, "Oh, look." There were portraits of all the men who had been Foreign Secretary and Colonial Secretary from the beginning. I said, "Look, there is so and so and so and so." I recognized the photographs from my years doing British History. Bruce and the Brit looked at each other and shrugged. They had never had anybody who was quite that familiar with the nineteenth century cast of characters. It was really funny.

Q: Were you noticing a variety of accents with your contacts at the Foreign Ministry? It used to be, and I go back to ???, talking on the phone, if somebody had other than an Oxford accent or mainly a highly developed Scottish accent, then you were talking to an administrator or consular officer.

JOHNSON: No, that has varied now some, but not a lot. In fact, my old friend's second son is now in the British foreign service. He has a very pukka accent. He had the credentials, Eton and Oxford. There were a number of people like him. When you actually go around looking at accents in the State Department, there are not too many the equivalent of working class Yorkshire accents.

Q: The accent really isn't an indicator in American society as much.

JOHNSON: But some. It is use of the language more than anything else. There are really quite a number of southerners in the Department. Most of the people I dealt with in

Britain were men. I have always enjoyed dealing with fellow munchkins because you get a lot of information from them than the higher up people will give you. Munchkins with tell you things.

Q: Were you able to tap into the newly emerging feminine contingent at the Foreign Office?

JOHNSON: There wasn't anything organized that I know of.

Q: Nothing I mean anything informal?

JOHNSON: Far as I know, there wasn't. But there was an outfit in Parliament, the kind of effort we have here like Emily's List. Women from across the board, from all political parties, had breakfast together. I was invited to one of those one day. There was a speaker and we got together and talked. There was a certain amount of camaraderie. I enjoyed the Foreign Office because I did my PhD on the Third Marquis of Salisbury, who was Foreign Secretary at the end of the nineteenth century. The Foreign Office building was his building. It just gave me a kick every time I went in to be tripping around in his place.

Q: I take it was very easy to break out of London as far as the personnel system. There were probably people panting to take your place.

JOHNSON: It was not that easy because it was off cycle. I left in January. Of course, there was always the battle of who owns that position. Was it NEA? It was on EUR's books, but NEA had controlled it. I was succeeded by two people from the Agency. Each did three months. My Foreign Service Officer successor was free in June and he came then. For those six months, the two people never pretended to be Foreign Service Officers. They had not served in the field before so it was reckoned to be really good experience for them. They both learned a lot.

Q: Was this fill in the off season? You expose people from the analysis branch?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: This makes good sense.

JOHNSON: There wasn't anything really hot and exciting going on. I was really a field person. I needed to get back to the challenge of the trenches.

Q: How did you feel about the outlook and the expertise of the British on the Middle East?

JOHNSON: Oh, they are sharp. They have been there a long time. And they are good linguists and they have good contacts.

Q: Did you get any feel for the other player, the French?

JOHNSON: No. They are not big players. As least not in Iraq they are not.

Q: When you get into Syria and Lebanon, they are.

JOHNSON: Yes. That's their turf. We struggled to keep them out. They did arms sales in order to get fuel, but . . After the British pulled out in '69, I guess, the Gulf has really been our pond. We protected it. We tried to convince people not to buy arms from the Soviets, not to make arms deals with them because we didn't want the Soviets to get a foothold.

Q: Did you cover Iran?

JOHNSON: I did but only vaguely. It was not a big issue at that time.

Q: Okay then. Where did you go?

JOHNSON: I came home and did six months of French and went to Algiers at a time when they were killing foreigners. It was pretty tough. It was in '94 and the fundamentalists had won an election. The old party did not want them to have power. The government canceled the results of the election. Then began a modest civil war. They began killing each other and killing foreigners.

When we went to visit our folks in Indonesia in 1960, I remember asking my father a question. And he said, "You know, Nancy, all foreigners here are Dutch. Dutch Dutch. British Dutch. American Dutch. But, we're all Dutch." I was reminded of that in Algiers, that we were all French. American French or French French. Algerians really did hate the French French because France had done a job on Algeria, on its society and culture and everything else. In a certain situation when they were killing foreigners, I don't think they ever came after us, personally, because the United States was not a big player. We were concerned about being in the wrong place at the wrong time. For example, driving along when a bomb went off. That kind of thing. It was physically very difficult because we were essentially prisoners of the Embassy. We lived on the Embassy grounds. We had quite an extensive area with three chunks of land linked together. But, we didn't go out at night very often. I think I went to two dinner parties in two years.

Q: You were there two years. It was '94 to . . ?

JOHNSON: '96. Ron Neumann was the ambassador. He is wonderful, very able guy and ran a nice Embassy. It was very pleasant, but it was also difficult because we couldn't even do our own shopping. You gave your basket and your shopping list and some money to one of the drivers and he went and did everybody's shopping every other day. There was a little snack bar we all ate lunch at, Americans and FSN's, because we couldn't get out.

Q: Talk about the situation in Algiers in '94 to '96. I mean the government. Where things were going.

JOHNSON: Things weren't going anywhere in particular. It was just a question of whether they could, among themselves, come up with some sort of resolution. We were not big players there. I think Ron was under a lot of pressure to close the embassy, close it down entirely. He fought that and I agreed with him. I can remember a staff meeting in the most secure part of the embassy when we talked about whether we should close it down and took a vote. It came out about even. Some people thought yes and some people thought no, but it was very fraught. We decided to stay because we had contacts with people.

For example, to go to the Foreign Ministry involved moving in armored cars with cars in front and cars behind and racing through the town. We didn't do it very often. Often I'd make a demarche on the phone in French. It was interesting because there was not a lot of English spoken. It was in French.

Q: Here is a country that had an election. From our perspective 'bad guys' won. But it was a democratic election which was canceled by, from our perspective, the more or less 'good guys,' you know, policy wise. But this was completely opposed to our policy of promoting democracy. How did we handle that?

JOHNSON: We didn't. We didn't go in and badger them about it as I recall. It's hard to admit I don't remember some of these things. The people who had overthrown the election were the old liners who had fought against the French, the National Liberation Front. They began to start taking steps to undo the damage. They set up a presidential election while I was there. They hadn't resolved some of the problems. After a certain point killing people just didn't seem to work. It was very ugly. There is a town called Blida south of Algiers which was very violent, a lot of people were killed there over a long time. Bodies every day and that sort of thing. Or, you'd hear about a couple of cars on the road heading toward the Moroccan border that were stopped and all the occupants were killed. That sort of thing. They went ahead and organized a presidential election and turnout was amazing. Now they have a legitimately elected president.

They have made changes since. They have had a parliamentary election since. It was hard to even make contact with people when you are a prisoner of an embassy. You can't get out. The consular officer met Algerians because people would come and get visas. Everybody wanted to get out, especially the Francophone people . . because of course the upper classes were raised speaking French and spoke an Arabic that was a mixture of Berber, Arabic and French. A lot of them had what they call "bolt holes." A lot of them had French visas and many people left. I bought a complete collection of Algerian stamps from somebody who had been a stamp dealer and was leaving. A lot of the middle class and upper middle class people just left.

Q: What impressions about your albeit fragile connections to the Algerian Foreign Ministry? Because Algerian diplomats have quite a reputation, obviously enhanced by the Iranian crisis in which they played a key role, but even before that.

JOHNSON: They were very helpful in some of the airplane hijackings in the eighties. They are very astute. And, of course, Algerians were in the non-aligned movement because they had won the battle with the French, however ugly that war was. They had a lot of standing. They were always polite, pleasant. They were as helpful as they could be most times if it was in their interest. If not, they weren't very. And Algerians themselves, most people are fascinating. Politicians were all quite happy to come and spend hours talking.

Q: How could you talk to them? Where did you see them?

JOHNSON: They would come to the Embassy. I had a little apartment in a house that was like a little English cottage. They loved to come and just sit around and have a natter all afternoon. That is when I became really sympathetic with foreigners living in this country. Because when you try spending four hours or five hours thinking and speaking in a foreign language, my computer—my brain-- goes kaput after a while. It's really hard. So if you think of people in this country who have to speak English all the time, it is hard. It's very hard. But, it was good fun. People were interesting. But it is sort of a weird life. I can remember sitting . . . [end of Tape 3]

The Embassy in Algiers was in a compound, high on a hill overlooking the city. My office overlooked the city. From my prison, I could look out over the town. I can remember one day there was this huge boom. There was a bomb down in the center of town. The fiancée of one of the Embassy guards was on a bus that was bombed. She and a bunch of other people were killed. It was a very brutal bombing. We could hear bombs regularly. We could hear gunfire regularly. The British Embassy was at the bottom of the hill. One night there was a gun battle at the intersection in front of their Embassy and everyone spent it at the ambassador's residence, on their stomachs, flat on the floor. So it was a difficult time.

Q: To say the least. Did you have much contact with the French embassy? I was wondering what role they played there.

JOHNSON: We had contact with them. I used to call our compound a 'mighty fortress,' but ours was nothing compared to theirs. We saw them at events occasionally. We'd go to the French embassy or occasionally they would come to us. But we didn't have that much to do as I recall. I think the ambassador might have dealt with his French colleague on occasion, but I don't recall.

Q: What was our rationale finally, after all the debate, of staying on?

JOHNSON: I think the irony was we really needed to be there. It was a poor country. It was not a hostile country. We needed to be there to report and get a sense of what was

going on and see if we could help. I think we were selling them grain. There was some business as well. But mostly it was . . .

Q: They had oil too . . .

JOHNSON: They had oil. I'd forgotten about the oil. . . . It's pretty safe down there. And, of course, the relations with Morocco and the Western Sahara issue. So, there were enough reasons to have a small embassy. And it was. It was a small embassy.

Q: What about Western Sahara during your time? What was happening?

JOHNSON: Nothing much was happening. There was still a discussion of how to construct the list of voters that would take part in a plebiscite of the Sahrawis to decide whether they would become part of Algeria or part of Morocco. Actually, I broke new ground because I went out . . I should say to get in and out of Algiers after bombings and other events, we had a special procedure. There was a hijacking on Christmas Eve 1994 involving an Air France plane. I think a number of people were killed. It was reckoned thereafter that we wouldn't come in and out on regular scheduled airlines. So we had a charter flight. And, of course, you couldn't have it on the same day of the week. It was twice a month. There was never a regular interval. I went out on this little plane, in and out of Madrid. Then I went on to Morocco. The POL chief in Morocco and I went into Western Sahara together. We had a really fascinating time, and met Abdulaziz who is the president of the Polisario and did all kinds of things. We stayed overnight in a tent. The problem was just at an impasse. It is still at an impasse.

Q: Did you get involved in the, you had some prisoners sitting out in the desert I guess?

JOHNSON: I went and took photographs of them.

Q: Yes. It strikes me as unusual and I . . .

JOHNSON: Just insane. The Polisario would like to give them up. The Moroccans don't want to, aren't happy about taking them back. So they are sit there. I was taken to see them. We went to see them. I took photographs and then gave them to someone in the Embassy to try to give to their families in Morocco. There seemed to be no end in sight on that one. It was fun to go to Agadir because they had a big crisis there in what, 1907?

Q: Yes. 1907.

JOHNSON: Real pleasant town, Agadir.

Q: The Germans came in a . .

JOHNSON: Warship? Battleship wasn't it?

Q: Yes. Tiger I think the name was. It vaguely comes back. This is Kaiser Wilhelm playing his early games and got the L_____ crisis. Just one of those diplomatic blips.

JOHNSON: 1907 I think it was. 1908. So, yes. While I was in Algiers, of course the day after the flight out, my mother called and confirmed that my father was dying and, so, could I come home? One of those sort of Foreign Service things. People stayed in the Embassy to make it possible for me. The admin officer went to town. They decided to put me on Air Algerie flight the next day. She could only make Air Algerie reservations as far as London. So she called the Embassy in London and got a man, the only one in the embassy at 7:15 at night still there besides a marine, who said, "Yeah, I know Nancy Johnson. I'll take care of it." He made reservations for me on home from London. The next day, we went out to the airport. Unfortunately, the Air Algerie flight was three hours late. The security guys had to stay with me while we waited because they were concerned. But it worked. Eventually I got to London just as my United flight was leaving. So I overnighted and the airline, it was Lufthansa, put me up in a hotel at the airport. I made a lot of phone calls. And, I got my Dad. I said, "I won't be making it tonight because I missed the plane. But, I'll come tomorrow." Then I called my sister who was supposed to meet me. When they went to see Dad in the hospital, he said, "Nancy called and she's not going to be coming until tomorrow." They didn't believe him. They thought he was hallucinating, but he was right. I got home, that was in '95, and spent about ten days here during which Dad died. But I will never forget that all along the line, people were willing to go the extra mile for a colleague.

Q: You left in '96? Anything else we should talk about do you think?

JOHNSON: No. I came back and did a year at the Army War College, which was fun. Then I did Arabian Peninsula affairs. I was the deputy director for that. Then I did some inspecting for . . .

Q: Maybe we could have another session? I think this is probably a good place to stop. We'll pick this up the next time. Is there anything else we haven't covered in Algeria?

JOHNSON: I don't think so. I'll have to think about that.

Q: If there is any incident or anything like that . . .

JOHNSON: It was physically difficult, I mean we had crazy housing. The DCM's residence was an old Turkish house and there was a separate apartment in the basement of that. There were some apartment's in another building that we had to move out of because a bus crashed through the wall and they realized it wasn't safe to stay there. I was at first in a house near the apartment building. The boiler and heat were down at the bottom of the hill and I didn't have heat most of the time in the winter. It was physically difficult. But, I'm not sure too crucial in policy terms.

Q: How did this work people wise all you people cooped up together?

JOHNSON: What was very interesting was on Friday, which was the Saturday, people did their own things. I stayed home and wrote letters. The beach bunnies went off to the pool at the ambassador's residence, on the ambassador's compound. The Embassy and the ambassador's residence and the Marine house were all on one chunk of land. My house and the apartment building were all on another. And then on a third was the DCM's residence and some other houses. Eventually we moved just to the two that were right across the street from one another. Crossing this busy street was always an adventure too. On Fridays people tended to stay in their own homes to get away from each other, I think is the way I would put it. We were very respectful of each other. I mean, we didn't pop in on somebody on a Friday.

Q: Nobody killed anybody?

JOHNSON: No. It was a very nice group. The embassy, being an old Turkish house, had an atrium that was covered. We brought in a table. The RSO got hysterical about us bringing in this table because it might have had been bugged. We started doing jigsaw puzzles. I can remember coming out of my office on the second floor offices, which opened onto the little balcony. The ladies room was right across the atrium, so you had to go all the way around. I could look down. Somebody had pooh-poohed the idea of the jigsaw puzzle, but every time I came out with the ambassador to go somewhere, his protection was sitting there waiting for him, and they'd be working away on the puzzle. Everybody worked on the puzzle. The most popular was one of a Harley Davidson motorcycle. The guys really liked that one. But everybody had a hand at this. There were things like that. The ambassador was very good about morale, sensitive to the issues of people being cooped up. Early on you realized that everyone had to get out every three months. You just couldn't be there more than about three months straight. And, hence, you had this little private plane that you could take out. It was cramped and small and an adventure. We didn't have any fights or anything. I think people were really good about avoiding the people they didn't like, if there were those things, and finding time to be alone so you didn't feel cooped up.

Q: Marines had a happy hour and all that?

JOHNSON: They did. They did. I have never been a beer drinker, so I generally didn't go. They were good guys.

Q: Okay. We'll pick this up the next time. And this will be '96 when you left Algeria. And we'll talk about what you did thereafter.

JOHNSON: Okay.

Q: Great.

Q: Today is the first of February 2008. Nancy, you unearthed some letters from your archives covering both Bagdad and Algeria. And, if you want to add those to the record, go ahead.

JOHNSON: This is a cable I wrote when we got to Amman, having left Bagdad on August 21, 1990. Joe Wilson asked me to do a report about our trip. This is three weeks into the crisis. [Reading] . . .

To the border.

3. Immediately upon leaving the Embassy at 0200 August 21st, we were tailed by white Passat containing two men. At the Fallujah interchange 50 kilometers outside Bagdad, we encountered our first checkpoint, organized by the men in the Passat. The policemen and plainclothesmen were nervous and not quite sure what they were doing or wanted from us. After checking all papers and passports and holding us up for 35 minutes, we were allowed to proceed. We wondered if the men in the Passat were Dick Russell's tails. In all our contacts with GOI officials during the day, DIA presence in the convoy elicited special attention and concern. (That is not/not a complaint—later convoys should be prepared for the problem.)

4. The second checkpoint, at Ramadi interchange, 130 kilometers from Bagdad, was manned by soldiers and uniformed men and took 45 minutes. They insisted that people in vehicles match travel permissions, so we shifted people around. When the checkers could find no other reason to hold us so they let us proceed.

5. At both checkpoints, loaded cars with Kuwaiti plates, Iraq licensed cars, and buses clearly heading for the border were turned back. Only Iraqi oil tankers, trucks with Jordanian licenses and the convoy were allowed to proceed. For that reason, from 0430 when we left Ramadi until dawn, there was no traffic on the road and we proceeded without further problems to the border, stopping just after dawn to refuel. The road was superb—brand new six-lane highway all the way. However, the stretch from Ramadi to near Rutba does not/not have lane lines. For tired drivers, mesmerized by tail lights of the cars in front, this was the most difficult 150 kilometers of the trip. It was hard to tell where the road ended and the desert began as we hurtled through the darkness, seemingly eight vehicles alone in the world.

En route

6. Once daylight came, there was light traffic on the road. Buses, oil tankers (full) and empty Jordanian trucks were heading toward the border. The reverse was the case on the Baghdad-bound side. Alf Cooley reckons we saw one truck/tanker/bus every one minute. (Cooley adds: Since half of the eastbound were empty oil tankers this would be one import truck per four minutes past a fixed/fixed point.) A 6-CD (Saudi Arabia) Mercedes passed us. We did not/not see it at the border.

At the border (four and a half hours)

7. No words could adequately describe the mass of cars and humanity at the border which we reached at 09:15. Thousands of people, hundreds of cars, in addition to buses,

trucks and oil tankers. Hordes of mostly Egyptians were milling around outside the border post area and inside of it. We estimate 10,000 people. The whole area was an open sewer. Pityou [an Embassy FSN] put us in the correct lane (left hand) and we moved into the customs area. He and Bob Sage went off to deal with officials and the convoy had to move on. On the advice of Lee Hess and Chris Gould, who had both crossed the border in the past, we moved to an area to the right of the customs post. (This is past the first set of customs houses, to the left through a wire fence, immediately right thereafter.) For the next three hours we sat in our cars, shaded by the roof of the customs area, surrounded by good-natured Egyptians. Our scouting parties found Sage and Pityou sometime later. [We put in all this detail to help anyone who came in a later convoy.]

8. Sage meanwhile searched for someone in authority willing to stamp our passports. Everywhere he went he was followed by Egyptians. He found a senior immigration officer by illegally entering the PTT office by the back door. The man agreed to deal with us but only after a two-hour wait (nothing unusual). Once passports were stamped, getting clearance on the cars was merely a question of pushing to the head of a long line and being persistent. We filled up the vans with gas at this point. RSO returned IDs to Pityou. We did not need them any more.

9. Leaving Pityou, we then proceeded to the final barrier and, it turned out, the final problem. The uniformed officials would not let us pass without gate passes, which we did not know we had to get as we entered the customs complex. Nor did anyone at the gate give us one. Bob Sage then convinced one of the uniformed guards that we needed his help. He drove Bob (in his own car) to the Chief of Customs' Office. That officer agreed it was silly to send all seven cars back to the gate. Instead, he sent a subordinate with Bob and our helper to the convoy, then parked in the sun watching tankers and trucks cross the border and Iraqi guards chase fleeing Egyptians and beat them. The subordinate did the final paperwork and we were off at 13:45. One passport was also not stamped—an oversight—necessitating a return trip to Immigration.

10. The trip across no man's land was easy. We were met as we came to the Jordanian customs post by AmEmbassy Amman staff, and were we glad to see them! Everything thereafter went smoothly. It is a long ride to Amman. We got to our hotel by 19:00 our time, were met by Ambassador Harrison and staff and have been treated well ever since.

11. Bob Sage did a marvelous job dealing with officials. John DiCarlo was an excellent wagon master. Everyone did what he or she had to do, without complaint or comment or creating an incident that would affect us all. It was a real team effort. Finally, God speed to all we left behind.

12. Recommendations:

1. Match people and cars to MFA permissions from the beginning. Bigger vehicles should carry more people than small ones. There should be one man for every three women, if nothing else to watch cars.

2. Jerry cans of fuel are a must as it is impossible to get to the gas station at the border
3. An American with good Arabic and an understanding of Arab officialdom will be required. Pityou was not, repeat not, permitted access to the senior (necessary) officials.
4. And, finally, if possible, fly. (End of reading)

So that was the last of Baghdad. I did read my letters to my parents about London. I spent time dealing with the Iraqi opposition.

Q: What were they?

JOHNSON: This was the period when we helped create the Iraqi National Congress. I got fat having lunch with Ahmed Chalabi. The opposition was mostly handled by another branch of the United States Government. But I had official dealings with all the people and it was fascinating. They ranged from Sharif Ali who actually looks like the first king and is his great nephew, on through to the communists. Frank Ricciardone, who had been watching Iraq from Jordan, and had to come out, spent a few months in London working with the INC and helping to put it together. They always struck me as a group of mostly chiefs and no Indians. Iraqis don't have a tradition of being subordinate. So it was very hard for people to compromise, to put together an organization that would work.

Q: How serious were they really? At least, from your perspective?

JOHNSON: I think it was a very serious effort to organize the opposition so that everybody would be working in the right direction in case something happened. The fact that Saddam survived astonished everybody. Nobody knew how weak or how strong he would be, so having an organized opposition could useful. I think the INC over time developed an army.

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: I mean they were busy doing propaganda and all kinds of things in Iraq. So it was a serious effort.

Q: What was your impression of Chalabi?

JOHNSON: Smooth operator. Very smooth operator. I think he knew how to manipulate us and he did.

Q: Still is.

JOHNSON: Still is. Knows how. Had big friends in the Defense Department. I saw the Iraq opposition. I chatted with them. I wrote reports about what they were saying. But it wasn't the nuts and bolts of the outfit that I was involved with.

Q: Now, back to Algeria. You want to give us some extracts from letters?

JOHNSON: The letters were like a diary and very detailed. From December '94, there was a hijacking of an Air France plane in Algiers and a couple of people were killed. So it was decided that the airport wasn't safe. They figured out that we would use a little charter plane to come in and out. And because we didn't have a regular mail service and the pouch service was lousy, we started sending letters by anybody who was going home. You carried letters. It is a Foreign Service tradition. I'll never forget my first post to Sri Lanka, somebody's parents were there right before Christmas. The father took a bag full of Christmas cards. He said when he got home to his little town in Florida, he went to the post office and started putting our letters through the slot. The postmaster couldn't believe it. Because of this system, I felt free to be less circumspect in my letters to my folks than I was in Baghdad.

Q: Nancy, do you think that it would be possible rather than read them here, could you put these on a . . .

JOHNSON: I would love to read them, although it took me a whole morning just to read 1995.

Q: Look, how about as an exercise. . .

JOHNSON: I can give you the thrust of it. There were two things we were doing. For a long time the issue was whether we would stay there and what our role would be if we stayed there. The people who had been there before the troubles began wanted to close the shop. They saw it all collapse. And the people who came knowing it was a difficult situation, because we were essentially prisoners of the embassy, for them it wasn't a problem. We knew it was going to be this way. Until all the oldsters left, we had this discussion going on. Nobody wanted another Tehran. So security was a big issue. We lived on the compounds. I got out to three dinner parties in two years and very rarely got out during the day. I can remember, in one letter I complained that Ron Neumann, who was the ambassador, went out every day or every other day. He didn't realize what it was like for the rest of us who didn't go out. But, that was unfair to Ron. He made an effort to let us go out. The letters were very detailed.

Q: I don't know if you have time or not, but you do use a word processor, do you?

JOHNSON: I'm not sure I want all this on the record.

Q: Okay. Take a look at the letters because I think sometimes the details of things --edit it as you see fit--add a great deal to the record.

JOHNSON: The kind of thing that I wrote about, because it was safe, I could send home maps of the compound, what have you. I lived in a house that didn't have any heating and it got awfully chilly in Algiers in the winter. I wrote about sitting at my desk with a bar heater across the room and the reflection of it in the window as I wrote. One dreary Christmas, there was no heat in the house but I had a fire in the fireplace, which didn't even warm the large room. People came and we had spaghetti and pecan pie or

something. A sense of how tired people were and how difficult living was comes out in the letters.

Q: Well anyway, think about it. What we could do is, if you put this in computer language, what you want, not the whole thing, excerpts or something, we could put this into the thing. Because I think it would give an interesting insight into life there.

JOHNSON: It really does. It brought it back just in an extraordinary way.

Q: Well think about it. That can be sort of your project, if you like.

JOHNSON: We lived in three compounds divided by a two lane highway and a very small side road. One of them had the embassy and the ambassador's residence and had a path around it. I wrote that I felt like a gerbil going round and round on this path. I wrote about the kind of pressures we were under and those sorts of things. I'm not sure how much the security people would get upset when I talk about some of the things . .

Q: Okay. I will let you play with it. I suggest we move on. When you left Algeria, whither?

JOHNSON: I went to the Army War College for a year.

Q: This would be what, '90?

JOHNSON: Class of '96-'97. It was a wonderful experience actually. There were 321 of us in the class, divided into 20 seminars. There were 17 in ours. The seminars were all carefully organized so that each had one woman at least, two foreigners, a civilian, a Navy or Marine officer, an Air Force officer, and various branches of the Army so you didn't get two communicators or two tankers or what have you. I was a double whammy because I was a civilian female. Our foreigners were an Egyptian general and a Japanese colonel. We had an engineer and we had an Air Force guy, and we had a Navy captain and, let's see, communicator, logistics, a medical man. It was a very interesting group. I was in Seminar One. Each Seminar had its own motto and ours was, "A different animal." For each seminar the authorities had appointed a president. In the beginning, we were sitting around trying to figure out what we should have for a mascot. Our president drew something on his computer like no animal in the world and we liked it. So our motto became "a different animal." Each seminar had its own motto. Seminar Eleven had two aces. It was very clever.

For the military, it was a training ground for people who were going on to be generals, senior people. They wanted civilians because we think differently and we have a different point of view. The colonels were going to be dealing with us. In the Pentagon, you have to deal with the State Department. One of my seminar mates said to my mother at the end of the year, "We never knew what she was going to say." I was just a different Myers-Briggs type from them. It was just a fascinating year and nice to have a break from all things State Department.

Q: What part of the program did you find particularly illuminating or useful to you? Any particular subjects?

JOHNSON: Actually, I think it was being able to talk with the military and understand how their system worked. We had a day, two days, to talk about the budget process in the Pentagon. They put up a chart on the wall that was probably ten feet by four feet of the route money takes going through the Pentagon. They tried to explain how it worked. And I said, "Folks, this isn't good. It's not clear." I was struck by how very lucky we are in our military, how dedicated people are, how hardworking and how decent they are. I think it was the personal experience more than anything substantive that I enjoyed most.

Q: Did you get any impression of the differences between say the Air Force and Marines?

JOHNSON: Yes. The Navy captain was wonderful because early on there was some esoteric discussion about something. And he said, "You know, in the Navy we call these fur balls." Everybody brought something to the table that was different. Because they came from different branches in the service, they all had something to add. We began every day in the seminar with a meeting and announcements and things. And, then we went off to classes and lectures. We had an assembly when people would come and lecture us. We had a lot of senior military types talk to us about policy. Ambassador Charles Freeman came and talked to us about U.S. foreign policy among other things. The assembly hall was known as the 'big red bedroom' because people tended to fall asleep. You sat with your seminar basically. Sports were high on the list and everybody played baseball. It was all like we were 18 or 19 or 20 again only the bodies were older. People had some amazing sports injuries.

Q: Did you find a breaking down, were you a good source of information about State Department? Did you find that they were using . . ?

JOHNSON: Yes. I think it is a good idea to have people there. Not only because the mind works differently, but we talked about how the State Department works, and how it's organized and who does what, what some of these things mean. And we talked about how embassies work. Everybody, except the Japanese, had been involved in the Gulf War. So we talked a lot about that.

Q: I thought the Japanese sent some naval missiles there?

JOHNSON: Sorry, I meant the ground forces. I took a class called "Advanced War Fighting." We refought World War II and the Korean War. And then, in the end, we fought the Gulf War again, talked and read about it. The course was organized so that each class dealt with one topic with two presenters, the main presenter and a supporter. I volunteered to go first and did the German invasion of Norway in 1940. Then I was the assistant for the last presentation. The Egyptian talked about the 1990 Gulf War from his point of view. That was a fascinating discussion because the tanker man talked about

what his experience was like, roaring across the desert. The logistics person talked about the efforts he had been making to get materiel to Saudi Arabia and all the problems. It was fascinating.

Q: I assume you took one of these trips too?

JOHNSON: The Army War College only had two trips, one to New York and a trip to Washington. They didn't have the kind of trips that the National War College has. But we did what they called staff rides. In the early days, because the Army War College has been going for 150 years, they used to be actually on horseback. We walked battlefields. We went to Gettysburg and Antietam and we had a weekend trip with an overnight in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and we did the Wilderness. To be with military people and to see it through their eyes was fascinating, especially Gettysburg. We had a real expert. It was one of our teachers, seminar leaders. We spent a whole day there. We walked Pickett's Charge and we did Chamberlain's swing down Round Top.

Q: Gettysburg is a personal thing because I am almost not here because of Gettysburg. My grandfather was at Gettysburg, not great grandfather, but grandfather. He was a young lieutenant with a Wisconsin regiment and was wounded on the first day of Gettysburg and was actually a prisoner for a couple of days, but in a hospital. When the Confederates pulled out, they left the Union wounded. So, he was lucky, very lucky. I am lucky because I am here.

JOHNSON: They recommend War Colleges as the next assignment after you become a Class One officer. It was a good break to think in strategic terms, rather than tactical terms, and to take a look at different problems. Somewhere along the course of the year, each seminar had an exercise to deal with Libya that was acting up. I got chosen to lead the Libya team. What were the allies going to do to deal with Libya? I knew right away they were going to refight the Gulf War because you always deal with a war that you know and love. Our team got to thinking outside the box as they say and decided that we would drop chemical weapons on ports in Tunisia and along the border with Egypt, which, of course, stymied the others. When we announced that we were going to drop these bombs, the heads of the other teams said, "You can't do that!" One of the people on my side replied, "Oh, yes, we can!" with a huge grin on his face. The staff was trying to get people to think in different terms. I think they did. My Seminar mates still e-mail me whenever they have a State Department question.

Q: What role did the Japanese colonel [play] because you know the Japanese military have been under tremendous constraints, probably for the entire time he was in the military. What was his impression?

JOHNSON: He didn't say much. We were never in class together, so I never got to talk to him much. He talked a little bit about Japanese foreign policy but he didn't go into the details of Japanese military affairs. When I later inspected in Japan, I got in touch with him and it was really fun to catch up with him.

Q: This is 1996-97 so you had an election going on. At this point, as secretary, how did the military people that you were dealing with relate to the Clinton Administration, because Clinton had a very rocky time at the beginning?

JOHNSON: They were very conservative, about 90 percent. There was one other Democrat in my Seminar. I don't know what the numbers were but they tended to be Republican and conservative. If you have sometime in this country an extremely liberal president, it kind of worries me that they might feel that they had to do something unconstitutional. But they are also extremely conscious of this issue. We talked about this at one point informally, and they said, "We would support the Constitution. That's our job."

Q: Yes, you don't take your oath to the president, you take your oath to the Constitution of the United States. There is a difference.

JOHNSON: By and large they are a bunch of straight arrows and awfully nice people. They were good friends.

Q: Did the issue of homosexuality come up in the discussion because this was an issue particularly when Clinton first came in?

JOHNSON: I remember. No, we didn't really talk about that. It was a relaxing year in many ways.

Q: Would you say that the military was at least keeping a wary eye on China as maybe the next problem?

JOHNSON: Not China, but the whole Pacific Rim was an issue. We had a big exercise in the spring. I had forgotten about it. For some reason I didn't play in it, or was in only a very minor way. I don't know what it was about. The instinct of the military is to do it the way you did it the last time.

Q: In 1997 wither?

JOHNSON. I went to the Office of the Inspector General for two years, 1997-99.

Q: During the inspection, this was 1998, what places were you inspecting?

JOHNSON: The first one was Personnel, and then Greece and Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Japan and Dominican Republic. It really is amazing. We went to Japan and were there for nine weeks. We had a chunk of time in Tokyo and then I drew the short straw and ended up in Okinawa and Fukuoka, while others from our team went to Kyoto and several other consulates. I was lucky in Greece. I was sent to look at Thessalonica, which is where Ataturk was born. Then we went on to Turkey, which was fun with four weeks in Ankara and two weeks in Istanbul. It was great. I really enjoyed it. I was doing the political and economic sections and anything that would be helpful.

Q: What was your impression of Greece at the time and Greek relations with the United States?

JOHNSON: They were pretty good. The ambassador was Nick Burns. He was a very popular fellow. It's funny, I think one of the functions of an inspection --- it's interesting --- is that the post gets ready for it and it is like spring cleaning. Everything that needs to be done, that should have been done and hasn't been done, gets done before the inspectors come. Once the inspectors come, people let off steam. I talked to a man in Athens after lunch one day. He was an unhappy camper but not because of things in the Embassy. He just had issues in his personal life. We talked for about an hour and a half. Afterwards he said, "You ought to put out a shingle. They don't pay you enough for this." The chance to talk to someone who knows about the Service, who understands where you are and what you're doing and isn't going to tell anyone and isn't in the Embassy is very valuable for people because they let off steam in ways they wouldn't and talk it over and get ideas about how to deal with problems without it being on the record, without their bosses knowing, and all that sort of thing. Essentially, that was the major function.

Q: It's been that way. I did some research on earlier diplomatic counsellors. You used to have people called Counsels General at Large. Really, this was at the turn of the century. It was like having traveling psychiatrists. It was helpful for people way out and with no contact with the home office for a long time.

JOHNSON: If you are in a tight situation like Algeria where you can't get out and you are stuck there with each other, to have someone to talk with is good. As you know, you do a lot of preparatory work before you go out. You talk to all the people who read the traffic that the posts sends and find out what the holes are and look at what they've been reporting on and talk to Embassy staff about what their plans are and what they might cover if they are not and that kind of thing. When you get out there, you are a sounding board. It was fascinating work and there are wonderful places that you get to visit. I was in Prague for three weeks in the spring. It was really nice.

Q: Obviously you can't talk about actual people, but did you run across any real problems, like alcoholics, inappropriate affairs, harassment, you know, the whole lot?

JOHNSON: Yes. We did.

Q: How did you deal with something of that nature?

JOHNSON: Every inspection team has an ambassador in charge. So we discussed it with him and he discussed it with the person involved and with the person's supervisor. That's how they worked it. I think it worked out in the end but the fact that we came made it an easier situation but it was still pretty awkward. The person who was doing whatever it was, was not aware how offensive his behavior was. It really brought him up sharply. Of course, he went on to be promoted.

Q: Did you before you went, did you find that you were pointing out to people managerial styles because I'm sure Foreign Service people are not well trained in management.

JOHNSON: It's not our strength. I think it is really funny that we try to manage ourselves and don't do it very well. It is very important, I think, to have an experienced ambassador in charge of the inspection team, because often an ambassador at post needs somebody to talk to, to say, "How do I deal with this?" Or, if he or she isn't dealing with something very well, for an experienced ambassador to give them examples from other inspections or whatever they'll have experienced, it helps them out.

Q: Who was your ambassador?

JOHNSON: It varied. We had a number of them. Tom Weston was one of them. I've forgotten their names. I've blocked there names since I left. I think I went out with the same person a couple of times, but most of it was very different each time.

Q: There was the perception that, particularly the new inspection, it was changed during the 1980s, I guess, and they put a non-Foreign Service Inspector General in and all that. They boosted up sort of the accounting side of things so that you really had to be wary of this because it was a case of, you know, they were "looking to gotcha." How did you find it?

JOHNSON: We always made the point that we were not there to "gotcha." When we arrived at post there was always a meeting with all the Americans. The team leader would make this speech and, individually, we always said, "We aren't here to catch anybody. We want to help you if you have a problem, and we'll sort it out or try to get people in to help you sort it out but we're not out to ruin anybody's career. We're not out to catch you doing bad things. If you're doing them, we'll try to find them and work them out." Our attitude was that we were trying to be helpful as opposed to "gotcha." I think it helped people be more frank with us, and I think they were sort of relieved when we were gone, and most of our recommendations were pretty straight forward things like "section x needs another FSN" or "this equipment or that equipment needs to be replaced" rather than destruction of careers.

Q: From there what did you do?

JOHNSON: I came back to the Department and became Deputy Director of the Office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs. It wasn't the world's best fit for me because I hadn't done that much in the Gulf. Except for Iraq and Bahrain for three months, I hadn't served in any other Gulf country. It was a fascinating office. What people don't realize is what a very busy office ARP is. When, say the Front Office asks for talking points for the Assistant Secretary's trip, there is a huge amount of paper from ARP because we covered eight countries. It's very active. On summer, I got to be Charge in Qatar because both the Ambassador and DCM had to be away from post. That was a very interesting experience.

Q: You were in ARP from 1999 to when?

JOHNSON: 2001. Allen Keiswettter was head, an old NEA hand. I did a year when Allen was in charge and then Margaret Scobey came, and she was head of it. I think it's been announced that she's going as Ambassador to Egypt.

Q: This was obviously some time after the Gulf War.

JOHNSON: You are going to ask me what the key issues were. I don't have any overwhelming recollection of anything in particular. I remember when we were reflagging Kuwaiti vessels and that kind of thing earlier in my career in NEA but this time it just seemed to be the general run.

Q: Was there an attitude of "how long will Saddam last?"

JOHNSON: We didn't have Iraq.

Q: I know you didn't have Iraq but who was menace? Was it Saddam, or was it Iran, or both?

JOHNSON: It was essentially both.

Q: They're not good neighbors.

JOHNSON: It's a difficult neighborhood, a very difficult neighborhood. Since we had come to the rescue of everybody in 1990, and had all our troops out there, we were friends. Relations were pleasant, back and forth, nothing that couldn't be solved, but nothing strikes me overwhelmingly in that period.

Q: There is a second act to this thing. You will be able to add as needed.

JOHNSON: The trouble is that I was here, and so I didn't write any letters, so don't have anything to refresh my memory.

Q: If something occurs to you as you go over the text, you can insert it. Was there any thrust for democratization, or was this sort of a back burner issue?

JOHNSON: It was back burner. NEA is an outfit that knows its countries and so operates in the realm of the possible. You encourage people. The Bahrainis were working their way towards reinstating a parliament, which I think they have now done. In that stage, nothing much had happened. The Kuwaitis were thinking about it.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Israeli-Palestinian thing? You were in NEA.

JOHNSON: Yes, but the peace process part of it was always closely held by a very small group of people. We just got the general flavor of our relationship with Israel and the Palestinians but nothing very detailed. I don't mean to be unhelpful but it is just sort of a blur, nothing really outstanding. I was intending to retire at the end of my two years in ARP but someone had unexpectedly retired from the Board of Examiners, and they were looking for a political officer and asked me if I would be interested. I was, so, I went along and did that.

Q: You did that from when to when?

JOHNSON: That would have been 2001-2002.

Q: What was the process?

JOHNSON: It's completely changed now. At the time, each team of four examiners dealt with no more than six candidates. It was all organized or choreographed so that all six candidates had the same experience. The day began for them with a group effort. They pretended, for example, that they were a country team, six members of it, each had a project that needed funding. They each had to present their project and try to convince the others to fund their project, not the others' projects. They were presented with a packet of information and given half an hour to read this, and then they worked from it. Each one had a separate packet. Each of us watched two of the candidates, and had a check list to see if they hit the key points that we expected them to hit. Sometimes people were way off. Sometimes somebody incisively got one key point right after the other. After that exercise, we had individual interviews for an hour, and then there was a writing exercise. The candidates were doing it at different times. At the end of the day, we then put everything together and talked about it. We told the people who had passed, and we called each one in to talk about how they had done. Those who had not passed, we sent merrily on their way.

Q: What was your impression of the candidates?

JOHNSON: Especially after 9-11, people wanted to do something for their country, and we had some very good candidates. We had some real kooky ones, too. They behaved kookily as the day went on, and it was apparent that they weren't going to make it. But we had some very highly quality people. We also had candidates who had tried and tried and tried. I remember one young man who was still in college nearly passed. In the private interview you ask people about their experience, and we look for certain qualities. This kid had spent summers working at a yacht club. Every summer ever since he was 14 up to age 22 had been spent at this yacht club, and every summer he had more responsibility and more responsibility. He talked about the different things that he had done in a way that showed he had the skills we were looking for. He just came up a little short but we encouraged him to come back when he finished college. He was someone we would like to have in the Service. We didn't tell him that but we encouraged him. Then, there was the guy who had taken the oral exam four times and still hadn't passed it. The other examiner and I spent a lot of time talking to him about other possibilities that

would involve foreign travel or working with foreigners. In other words, he didn't necessarily need to join the Foreign Service to work with foreigners. I think after four times, the writing was on the wall for him. Examining was fun to do. I enjoyed it. Back in Washington, we also interviewed people who were specialists. I would go along with, say, the secretarial office management expert to interview a potential OMS. We would have a chat, and my job was to get the candidate talking about general things. I would ask some general questions. Then, the specialist would take over. At one stage they were getting in communicators. I heard an awful lot about different technical aspects of setting up communications systems because the questions were "what would you do with a blah, blah, blah?" A very highly technical discussion would ensue about which I knew nothing.

Q: Most of them were coming from the military, weren't they?

JOHNSON: Many of them were but we had all kinds of people. The Service casts a fairly wide net so it gets some interesting people in.

Q: What was your impression of older people or second career coming in?

JOHNSON: We thought that was okay. It wasn't necessarily a problem if they had the right kind of skills and interests and experience. We had all ages but most people were in their 30s but also 40s and a couple of people in their 50s. I think the rule was that you had to be able to do one overseas tour before you retired. You needed to do five years to be vested in the retirement system, so we accepted nobody older than 60. A lot of people over 60, I think, were weeded out before the orals. It's a huge operation because I think 18,000 people took the written (exam). Of course, the process begins with a written exam. We never saw anybody until they passed the written. Then they came along to us. After us, it was just a question of whether or not they got security clearances. If they did, then they were put on a list. If the Department was putting together an entry class and needed two political officers and four economic officers and five consular officers, people came in cones, the top names on the conal lists would be chosen. They've gone back to the cone system. They would be selected according to their scores from these lists that we did not keep. We were just there to talk to people and come up with scores and go on our merry way.

Q: Was there any particular push to bring in women or minorities, or not, when you were there?

JOHNSON: No. There was a huge push to bring in officers, male and female or minorities, because there had been essentially very little hiring for a decade. This was the time when there was a big push, and we had money. I think they gave the exam twice a year because we were doing two lots of examination trips and had examiners year round on the road. I remember one trip, two weeks in Dallas, two weeks in San Francisco, two weeks in Denver, and a couple of weeks in Chicago. I was seeing the U.S.A. As a Foreign Service Officer, I didn't know the U.S.A. We went to Irving one year. To be in a city and to have it at your finger tips was fun. The way the system worked was that if it was a fully-manned team, there was one day when you were the back up. They had the

dance so organized that if one person were sick there would be substitute handy. If you were the back up and everybody came to work, you had the day off. In Dallas I rode the trolley and went to the art gallery and walked around with the sole guide book on Dallas. San Francisco was great. You were really annoyed with your colleagues when they got sick and you had to miss the sights. The system worked very well.

Q: Did you notice any difference between, say, recruiting in Dallas and recruiting in San Francisco?

JOHNSON: In Dallas we had a lot more Hispanics than we did in San Francisco. There were people who came from all over the south. In San Francisco we had a pretty good sweep of California and then Seattle going north. Denver was pretty lean but a nice town. We were there for two weeks. Not as many people passed there, candidates were not as qualified.

Q: Did you get a feel for the sectional American system? Were there more qualified people coming out of one area more than another?

JOHNSON: Yes, but I think it was partly skewed in the sense that there are a lot of universities in Boston and a lot of your people up there and in Chicago. In the bigger cities the pool from which to draw was a lot greater than, say, in Denver, although there is a university there but it is pretty sparsely populated in that part of the world. They were nice people but some of them were not awfully qualified, though some of them passed. I was very grateful to have a chance to see the U.S.A. I had a month in San Francisco, thank you taxpayers. It was really terrific. We stayed at a boutique hotel two blocks from Symphony Hall and the opera house.

Q: What then?

JOHNSON: I retired in 2002. I kept examining for another six months and then I went to work de-classifying documents, doing Freedom of Information and reviewing volumes of the Foreign Relations of the United States. It pays for all my hobbies.

Q: Great. What are your hobbies?

JOHNSON: I came to the piano a couple of years ago, so I play the piano. I am also a keen stamp collector since my brother did the Boy Scout badges. He had enough sense to stop but I've been at it ever since. I travel to the opera here and there.

Q: Okay, thank you very much.

JOHNSON: My pleasure.

End of interview