

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

PHILOMENA KORFF

*Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is October 28. And we are conducting our interview with Meena Korff. And Meena, where were you born and raised?

KORFF: I was born in Bombay, which is now called Mumbai, in India.

Q: Yes—

KORFF: And raised in Calcutta, now known as Kolkata.

Q: Ah, okay. Tell us a little bit about your family, how it was you moved from Mumbai to Kolkata.

KORFF: I understand that my father's job took him and his family from Bombay to Calcutta a few years after my parents were married. Each time my mom was ready to give birth, she would travel to her mother's place in Bombay, spend six months there, before returning to Calcutta with the newborn and the older kids. And that is how the Bombay connection continued for four of the five of us. However, when the youngest sibling was born, my grandmother traveled to Calcutta to assist.

Q: Okay— Now, where are you among your siblings?

KORFF: I am the second, —the eldest passed away in 2014, leaving the four of us.

Q: In Kolkata, what sort of education, what sort of school did you attend?

KORFF: I went to what's called a religious education school. In India, we referred to them as convent schools, run by Catholic nuns for girls. The one I attended was called Our Lady Queen of the Missions Convent School. Catholic priests ran separate schools for boys. Over the years, the nuns and priests focused on religious education, while lay teachers taught most of the other subjects.

Q: And how large was your school?

KORFF: I would say about five hundred. It went from kindergarten through the eleventh grade. We didn't have a twelfth grade back then. To graduate from high school in Commonwealth countries, we took the Senior Cambridge examination, which was the General Certificate of Education (GCE).

Q: Ah, yeah. So it was based, essentially, on the British system of education.

KORFF: Yes, it was. Our school year went from January-December.

Q: Now, while you were at school, were there particular subjects you excelled at or clubs or other activities?

KORFF: I did like Geography very much. And Biology, or Health Science, as we call it. Those two were my favorite subjects.

Q: And as you were growing up, did your family travel other than to Bombay, when your mother was pregnant?

KORFF: I don't think so as we were a big family and transportation wasn't that easy. When we were all in school, my mom would take us to Bombay to spend our summer holidays with my grandmother. Several times a week, my grandmother would walk us to the nearest beach, which was always a thrill! My father may have joined us a couple of times. Once, I remember, we all sailed on a passenger ship from Bombay to Mangalore to visit my great grandmother. That visit left a lasting impression on us all because we weren't familiar with life in the country, e.g., drawing water from the well, picking fruit and vegetables from the garden, running to the chicken coop each morning to collect eggs, using firewood for cooking, etc. We certainly learned a great deal from that visit, along with happy memories.

Q: What sort of work did your father do?

KORFF: He was working for a British company called Johnson and Johnson dealing with ceramic tiles and sanitaryware. Later he became a consultant for an export-import firm.

Q: And the other question about Kolkata, as you were growing up, did you, from your point of view as a student and going to school, how did it change? What was your experience of the city as you grew up?

KORFF: Kolkata was a vibrant, yet busy cosmopolitan city which didn't change much. Most private residential buildings were left unpainted and made to appear like they were in dire disrepair. The main reason for that, I believe, was to deter youth groups who went around soliciting donations for the Hindu religious festivals called Pujas, during the autumn months. The city did try to build flyovers or overpasses to ease traffic congestion.

Q: And as you were approaching the end of school, did you take all A levels? What was your plan, beyond High School?

KORFF: Our curriculum did not provide for A or O levels. Rather, ours was called Senior Cambridge Examinations, required to graduate from High School. Following school, I attended a culinary arts college, majoring in Hotel and Restaurant Management.

Q: Okay, so at least there was a sense that the hospitality sector was growing, too. There would be jobs there.

KORFF: That's right. My mom was very particular that all her children should receive a higher education and thus become independent. So that was the reasoning behind going to college. All of us went to college.

Q: Which school did you go to after high school?

KORFF: I went to the Hotel and Restaurant Management College.

Q: And that was a one-year program if I remember.

KORFF: No, it was a three-year course. I got a three-year merit scholarship which also covered my tuition.

Q: Oh, three years. Okay. During that time, did you also have apprenticeship or part-time work in the field?

KORFF: Yes, I did. I completed short internships at 5-star hotels during the summer. In New Delhi, I worked for about six weeks and in Kolkata for five weeks. And after I graduated, I joined the Oberoi chain of hotels, working with them for about six years, both in Mumbai and Kolkata.

Q: Now, at some point, you met your husband, Michael, when did that occur?

KORFF: I met him in 1980. I was working for a travel agent. And a common friend introduced me to him.

Q: And then, did he explain, and did you understand what the Foreign Service was and what he was doing?

KORFF: Not really. I understood that he was employed by the U.S. government and assigned to Kolkata as a Cultural Affairs officer at the United States Information Service (USIS). I was familiar with USIS as the American Library that showed films and held lectures. The British and Russians had similar Cultural Centers in Kolkata.

Q: And now, and then over time, you got to know each other better, but when do you decide to get married?

KORFF: After several years.

Q: Had he already left Kolkata or where did you get married? When/Where did you actually make the decision and—

KORFF: We made the decision in Frankfurt.

Q: Ah, okay.

KORFF: We traveled to the U.S to get married and returned to Frankfurt to complete the assigned tour.

Q: Okay, and what year was that?

KORFF: For the marriage? 1984

Q: Yes. Okay. Once you become the spouse of a Foreign Service Officer, did you become interested in working in any aspect of the Foreign Service in the embassy or other aspects of the embassy life?

KORFF: As a spouse of a Foreign Service Officer, my life, interests, and priorities had changed. I no longer wanted to continue working in the hospitality industry given the responsibilities that came with my new role. I pursued any kind of gainful employment at the embassy or consulate rather than work on the local economy where language skills were necessary. I was fortunate that I succeeded in being employed at all our overseas assignments. Down the road, I was interested in applying for the Mustang program.

Q: Yeah.

KORFF: The Mustang Program was introduced by the U.S. Department of State, as a mid-level conversion program, to allow talented civil servants to use their expertise more easily as members of the Foreign Service.

Q: Okay, did you actually apply to the Mustang program?

KORFF: I think I did.

Q: Okay,

KORFF: But I didn't qualify.

Q: Ah, okay. Then what became your first job as a Foreign Service spouse? Where did that occur?

KORFF: As a spouse, my first job was at the U.S. Army civilian personnel office, Abrams complex in Frankfurt, Germany, as an Entitlements clerk overseeing their Living Quarters Allowance. The position also entailed liaising with the U.S. Consulate in the

issuance of Reports of Birth Abroad and U.S. passports to Department of Defense civilians and their dependents.

Q: And how did you go? Did you simply apply? Was there an opening? How did that come about?

KORFF: As I vaguely recall, the job opening must have been published in the Consulate's weekly bulletin and I applied.

Q: That's fine. But then once you took the job, did they require training?

KORFF: Yes, I received two weeks on-the-job training by observing a senior colleague. I began working on a temporary security clearance, based on my husband's credentials, and subsequently obtained a full Secret clearance.

Q: Right.

KORFF: Once my full clearance was issued, I was given additional responsibilities.

Q: Alright, is there anything in particular, since this was your first job, sort of in the U.S. government as a spouse? Is there anything particular you recall from that?

KORFF: I really enjoyed working with my supervisor, a very kind and understanding woman. The work was new and involved a huge learning curve, as my prior experience was mainly in the Hotel industry, very different to my current job.

Q: Wonderful. Then did the skills you gained, learning how the U.S. government operates and so on, did that serve you well as at the next opportunity you had? Because if you moved with your husband, then to Bern, Switzerland?

KORFF: Yes.

Q: And, what were you? What was your thinking at that point? Did you want to work again? And how did it come about that you did work?

KORFF: Absolutely. I wanted to work because I didn't enjoy staying at home or wasting time socializing with other spouses. Given that the U.S. Embassy in Bern was small, job openings for spouses weren't easily available. Ultimately, after over 18 months, I was hired in the Visa Section.

Q: Sure.

KORFF: So, while working at the Civilian Personnel Office, I liaised closely with the U.S. Consulate. I accepted and reviewed birth registration and passport applications from the U.S. Army civilians and contractors, ensuring that they were properly completed along with supporting documents. In addition, I reviewed approval claims for their Living

Quarters Allowance. The contractors were mostly DOD [Department of Defense] teachers and U.S. civilians who worked at the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) and other military installations.

Q: And actually that those—

KORFF: The skills I gained while working closely with the U.S. Consulate in Frankfurt, Germany, helped me at our next post, where I was employed at the embassy in the Consular Section in Bern, Switzerland.

Q: —Sure, a very important introduction. So now you have reached Bern, Switzerland, and what happens there? Where did the job end up?

KORFF: Because it was a rather small embassy, employment opportunities were extremely limited. Sometimes, the RSO [Regional Security Officer] hired me for small projects, like reviewing telephone records of the former ambassador, among other projects, and paid me on an hourly basis. That of course didn't last long. Since our son was in school all day, my frustrations rapidly rose while waiting to find gainful employment. I was even prepared to leave post and go back to the United States, to keep myself occupied. After about 18 months, my husband informed the ambassador that his wife was going to leave him if she was unable to find employment at post. The ambassador realized the gravity of the situation and within a short while, I was hired in the Visa Section.

Q: Okay. Now, actually working in the visa section, did they send you for any training? Or did they give you anything at post for training?

KORFF: All training was provided at post. After being trained, I interviewed applicants, reviewed, and adjudicated their applications.

Q: Okay. And when you interviewed people for visas, were they Swiss? Or were they third country nationals—

KORFF: Mostly third country nationals in Switzerland, very few Swiss would come to the embassy, because they could apply by mail. Swiss who were first-time applicants, had to appear in person, even though the issuance rate was high. The majority of third country nationals included Iranians (by then, the U.S had closed its embassy in Tehran) and Turks.

Q: And did you run into particular kinds of problems?

KORFF: A lot. To be very honest, on the question, whether you take drugs, the Swiss would answer yes, that then led to further questioning. And I think because I was so junior, the problems were not handled by me, they were referred to more experienced staff to deal with. Some aspect of fraud was also prevalent.

Q: Did you end up having to deal with much fraud with false documentation or passports?

KORFF: I did not envision any fraud in that country, because the Swiss are relatively honest people. There was however some degree of fraud with false documentation, which I did not handle.

Q: So now you, you and your husband remain in Bern for four years from '86 to 1990. During that time, in the Consular Section, did you take on more and more responsibilities?

KORFF: Yes, before I transferred out of the visa section, I did adjudicate some immigrant visas which were more complex, with a greater potential for fraud where the applicant would sometimes include nephews or nieces and claim them as their biological children. I then moved over to the American Citizen Service. I received training in all aspects of consular work. I accepted, reviewed, and processed passport applications after the applicant's oath was administered by the Consul since I did not have that authority. Similarly, I accepted and reviewed documents for Report of Birth Abroad, issued certificates called witness to marriage, noting the person was in good standing, a requirement if an American wishes to marry a foreign national. Deaths and welfare and whereabouts of U.S. citizens were handled by a senior colleague.

Q: Interesting. Did you do any American Citizen Services while you were there?

KORFF: I did process U.S. passports and birth registrations. And so, previous skills and experience from my Frankfurt job were helpful.

Q: And did you end up having to deal with Americans who got in trouble?

KORFF: Given my limited knowledge and experience, I neither handled Americans in trouble, nor was I involved in identifying a deceased American. Those sensitive tasks were handled by a senior colleague.

Q: And then the other thing is occasionally, Visa Officers, Consular Officers have to interact with celebrities. Did you?

KORFF: Oh yeah.

Q: Did you have any that you remember?

KORFF: Yes, I remember. An interesting phone call I happened to answer was from someone claiming she was Audrey Hepburn enquiring if her passport was ready for pick up. Of course, as a Doubting Thomas, I didn't take her word for it: I requested her to come to the embassy in person. To my utter amazement, she did show up and we had a lot of laughs and a few pictures with her. She was just so simple and plain without any makeup; a gorgeous woman, but I didn't believe her. And I didn't know that she wasn't an

American. Then there was David Bowie whose passport was submitted for a visa. Another was Roger Moore who resided in Switzerland. I don't know whether I saw his passport, but he lived in Switzerland. There were others, I can't recall.

Q: Now in Switzerland, you and your husband also had small children. How did you manage that?

KORFF: I wasn't working in the first couple of years. We had one son. The first year he went to a local Swiss school, because he was too young for his grade, so we decided he would benefit from studying at the Swiss school for children of guest workers where the curriculum was in German. He would take public transportation to and from school, including his long lunch break. Being home was good as I was able to fix him a hot lunch. School hours were longer with half-day class on Saturday. Following that first year, he attended the International School of Bern.

Q: Okay, okay. And so basically the hours that you were working, he was at school.

KORFF: Yes.

Q: Okay. Now, as you approach the end of this tour in Bern, Switzerland, I imagine you and your husband talked about where you would go next. Do you recall what you were thinking about at that time?

KORFF: So long as I was employed, I liked life as a Foreign Service spouse. After Bern, since my husband would have been overseas for ten years, he was required to return home for a Washington assignment.

Q: Okay. So, you know, education then for your son is going to be I imagine public school or a nearby private school.

KORFF: Yes. When Mike's next assignment was confirmed, he traveled to the U.S. to scout out housing for us and a school for our son. Upon his return to Bern, we weighed the pros and cons of living in Washington DC and sending our son to a private school or living in Virginia and sending him to a public school. We decided we'd live in Virginia and send him to a public school. Although we owned a condo apartment in Washington, DC, we decided against living there and purchased a home in Virginia.

Q: But you then also wanted to work or what was your thinking at that time?

KORFF: Yes, I certainly wanted to work. I consulted the Community Liaison Officer at the embassy who provided me with a few leads to pursue when I returned to the U.S.

Q: And then how did you pursue additional jobs or additional work now that you're back in the U.S.?

KORFF: I contacted the Family Liaison Office and heard of several vacancies in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. Having amassed more than 12 months of employment as an Eligible Family Member (EFM) at an embassy, I was able to apply for civil service positions without having to take an exam and was hired in the Office of Passport Services. After settling into the new job, I learned that my name was quite a mystery to the folks who were going to interview me. They envisioned a blue-eyed, blond-haired person to walk in, but they were surprised to see that I wasn't. Nonetheless, they were impressed with my qualifications and happy to check the box for diversity.

Q: Interesting, Alright, when Okay, when you arrived there, as you know, a new employee, you let them know that you also had foreign language skills, did they use any of your Hindi or Bangla skills?

KORFF: Overseas I did, because the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] wanted me to translate conversation they had recorded that dealt with movement of drugs. Despite using code words for drugs, I was able to provide the gist of the communication.

Q: Oh, okay. Now, what were your duties, then in the passport office?

KORFF: I was secretary to the Director of Passport Services.

Q: And in that job, did you then acquire additional skills with relation to passports that were useful for you?

KORFF: Yes, I did. Initially, I took a secretarial course, followed by several additional courses and computer courses. When we learned of our next assignment to Dhaka, Bangladesh, I opted to take the 26-day Consular Training Course, which gave me a better understanding of the immigration laws and regulations for immigrant and non-immigrant visas - the whole concept of visa work and consular work, including American Citizen Services, including renunciation of U.S. citizenship. I figured it would help me in my next job.

Q: Interesting, that when you mentioned renunciation, I was in the Foreign Service, and I actually knew an American who did renounce citizenship. There were complicated reasons. But did you ever deal with renunciations where—

KORFF: Many, in Manila, Philippines and Tokyo, Japan.

Q: —That's interesting. Do you? Do you recall what the reasons were?

KORFF: They didn't specify outright their reasons for wanting to renounce. Some said they're settled overseas, and are not interested in going back to the U.S. Some of them were tax-related because Americans working and living overseas must file U.S. taxes as well as pay taxes on local income – becoming a burden of double taxation. Another possible reason was a fugitive who didn't want to return to the U.S. Most of them were, I think, money-related, because it was expensive to renounce U.S. citizenship.

Q: Yeah, yeah. All right. But we are for the moment we are back in 1992. In the passport office, you have taken the consular course. Once you took it, did the passport office try to give you more responsibilities, additional things to do?

KORFF: No, the consular course was in preparation for our next overseas assignment. Since it was not related to my current job, the office could not justify approving time off to take the two-month course, so I took it on my personal time, by accumulating several hours of comp time. Having taken the consular course, it qualified me to apply for the Bureau's new program for eligible family members overseas, viz., Consular Officer for Visa Purposes.

Q: Now well then let's go ahead and follow you to that. Next position, which is Dhaka, Bangladesh, you get there in 1992. And one fortunate thing is, of course that in Bangladesh, they speak Bangla. And so you have a bit of an advantage.

KORFF: Yes, I did. And I was able to fit right in with my consular training I had completed. Immediately, I was hired as one of the first Consular Officers for Visa Purposes at post. In that position, I worked in all the divisions of the Consular Section.

Q: Now, you get to Bangladesh. Is your son still with you?

KORFF: He is with us, and he attends the International School of Dhaka.

Q: Okay. Well, where did you fit in in the Consular Section in Dhaka?

KORFF: As a Consular Officer for Visa Purposes, I was also authorized to adjudicate citizenship and passports cases. I conducted visa interviews for immigrant visas, nonimmigrant visas, U.S. passports, Birth registrations, repatriations, arrests, other American Citizen services work, and anti-fraud work. That's where I started looking and seeing fraud. I would receive calls from British Airways and the Bangladesh Biman Airline airport staff when they suspected fraudulent travel documents or altered visas or green cards at check-in. The Bangladesh immigration staff would also request a visit when a drug mule (someone who was transporting drugs by ingesting pellets) was arriving on the incoming flight so I could interview the person alongside the immigration officer. These drug mules were subsequently detained and/or arrested. Making these verification/inspection trips to the airport enabled me to speak one-on-one with the perpetrator to find the source of these false documents. Although most of them could not name the source, some were able to provide names of shady travel agents or false document sellers. Other cases involved Members of Parliament who falsely claimed family relationships with strangers or party supporters to get a visa. In those cases, especially, my language skills were extremely beneficial as well as interpreting their body language.

Q: Interesting.

KORFF: — So I began to develop a very strong interest in that field.

Q: Did you? Since you had the language, did you also go out to talk to groups about how the American visa process works?

KORFF: Yes, we would go out to the airlines and explain to them what we were looking for. We provided hands-on document-check training – highlighting security features found in passports, green cards, visas, etc. And they got pretty good at spotting the fake or altered documents. Yeah!

Q: Yeah! Excellent. How heavy was the visa application load in Bangladesh? Was it given, you know, given your experience up until then, was it very heavy? Or, roughly how many did you have to deal with per day?

KORFF: Maybe about one hundred to one hundred fifty applicants a day.

Q: And that's just—

KORFF: Everybody wants to go to the U.S. Since the country is poor, job prospects are relatively low, so students who manage to get a visa hardly ever return despite the requirement of showing strong ties to their country. All it takes is one entry, and the person can continue to live in the U.S. so long as they don't get into trouble with the law. The return ticket is not helpful because they can always get rid of it or not use it.

Q: —Right? Were there any special tools that you used to try to figure out who would likely remain in the U.S. or who would come back?

KORFF: To determine whether the student was truly going to study or find employment, we'd check on their grades, background, parents' status, etc. Well-to-do families could afford to send their kids abroad to study because they were more likely not to drop out or find illegal employment. Given the limited time for each interview, the officer was required to make quick decisions on approval or denial of visas.

Q: So you worked in all the areas of the Consular Section, visitor visas, immigrant visas, citizen services as well?

KORFF: Yes, I did.

Q: Which did you enjoy the most?

KORFF: All areas of the Consular Section were interesting, but the work got monotonous as time elapsed. However, my favorite was conducting document checks at the airport and getting the person with suspect documents to confess to the fraud and obtain a sworn statement admitting misrepresentation. American Citizen Services at times got irritating, because some clients would think I was a local employee instead of an American officer. In their minds, an American officer was associated with being white. Once, a

Bangladeshi American who came to the embassy did not like my response to a question, so he asked to speak with my American supervisor! I called my junior consular officer, and I said, “this man is looking for my American supervisor”. When my “white” colleague asked how he could assist, the Bangladeshi American asked him the same question and received the same response I’d given. He also let the client know that I was his supervisor. The client was ashamed for appearing to be a racist and apologized before leaving.

Q: Sometimes as a consular officer, you also become the subject of newspapers, because, you know, there are stories that happen to you.

KORFF: Not to me as much, although, they did say that I was the person who denied most applicants. My refusal rate was, I think, about 60%. Being ethnically South Asian, I was quite familiar with the culture and body language of applicants, so most often I didn’t believe their stories and could spot a lie or fabrication quickly.

Q: Yes!

KORFF: —Periodically, the ambassador did hear complaints that I would refuse a greater number of applicants. Although he didn’t say it to my face, he informed the Consul General that I was being “very intense.” I defended my refusals and would not reverse my decisions in cases where I knew the person did not qualify for a visa. I informed the Consul General that he was welcome to overrule my refusal and thus own it. Due to front office interest in a case, the Consul General would sometimes overrule my decision, knowing that his evaluation might be impacted if he didn’t oblige.

Q: Right, right. Did you ever have someone overrule a case and then learn that they actually didn't stay in the United States? You are right?

KORFF: Not that I was aware of.

Q: I see.

KORFF: —We used to get a lot of people who overstayed their visas and received feedback from the U.S. Immigration. Unfortunately, the information was not timely, it arrived several months or years after the fact. By then, I had moved on so wouldn’t find out if one of my issuances was an overstay.

Q: Alright, so now you were in Dhaka for two years from 1992-1994. Of all the consular experiences you had, which one sticks out most in your mind?

KORFF: The high fraud environment required scrutiny of both applicants and their documents.

Q: Yeah.

KORFF: My next post was Manila, which was again another high fraud post. Working in the anti-fraud office was the best place I could have been. I enjoyed it. Usually, an officer spent about six months before rotation, but since I was doing such a wonderful job, I was allowed to spend a whole year. I became the deputy chief of the anti-fraud section.

Q: Alright, now before you went on to Manila with Michael, you did have another two years in Washington from '94 to '96. As a passport specialist.

KORFF: Ah, yes. I worked in Passport Services Correspondence Office, where people requested copies of Consular reports of death and birth abroad. I would provide authenticated copies of such documents to the requestor, after determining if I could release it to them. I was there for two years.

Q: Now, the thing I'm curious about here is you've now had a fair amount of experience in the Consular Section, as in the consular stream, were the procedures that we were using for Consular beginning to change?

KORFF: We were encouraged to take language classes, especially Spanish, to help understand local documents submitted with the Consular reports of birth or death. I also took additional advanced courses in Passports and U.S. Citizenship laws.

Q: And the other question about changes is digitization, computerization, was that beginning to have an effect?

KORFF: It did, more and more records were being uploaded and digitized. Passport records could easily be retrieved, which reduced the turnaround time. Documents that were not yet digitized but stored in file storage rooms, as paper documents or on microfiche, took longer to search and retrieve. Digitization certainly made the process more efficient.

Q: Okay, so now '94 to '96. You were back in Washington in the correspondent section, but then you go on to the Philippines with Michael in 1996. And how do you get the job there? What did you apply to? Or did they already have a job waiting for you?

KORFF: This was very interesting. Previously in Bangladesh, I was hired as a Consular Officer for Visa Purposes, under a new program. By 1995, the Bureau of Consular Affairs introduced another new program for overseas spouses called Professional Associates. Unlike a Consular officer for Visa Purposes, who was hired at post, this title authorized the incumbent, hired in Washington, to conduct the full range of consular-related adjudications. I was hired in Washington, which meant that I was paid at the Washington level. Again, I was in the first group hired under this program.

Q: So all right, when you get to Manila; Philippines is a large country, I imagined the Consular Section was quite large as well.

KORFF: It was indeed, and there we had just a few minutes to interview the applicant at the window because of the long lines. Also, the fraud was high, so we took no document at face value. Decisions were based on how the applicant came across during the interview and the content of their application.

Q: Okay, it was a large section. Do you recall roughly how large?

KORFF: How large is the embassy or how large is the Consular Section?

Q: The Consular Section.

KORFF: It was very large, especially the immigrant visa section. The non-immigrant visa section was also large because they processed temporary work visas under the H-1B program. A great number of Filipinos applied for positions as nurses, computer programmers, seafarers, etc. Immigrant visa applicants were also large. There was a great deal of fraud, even in the H-1B category. When fraud was detected, we requested the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to revoke the petition that it had approved. Petitions were approved in the U.S. by USINS [United States Immigration and Naturalization Service] and forwarded to the Embassy to subsequently interview the applicant. Although employers had attested to the Department of Labor that they would pay a fair wage to the nonimmigrant H-1B worker, in many cases they were paid much lower than stipulated in the petition. That would be another reason to return the petition to the INS for revocation. Writing up those revocations was not only a tedious job, but it also took INS several months to take appropriate action. Very few came back overturned, most of them were revoked as requested.

Q: And those were mostly the H-1B's. Did you also deal with visitor visas?

KORFF: Yes, the bulk of the visas were B-1/2. Visitor visas, business visas, Student visas, E visas. The E1 visa allows someone to work in the U.S. and carry out substantial trade between individuals and firms in the United States and the country of which they are a citizen or national. Again, there was a huge amount of fraud in all these categories as well.

Q: Yeah. I imagine it's a big immigrant visa section as well.

KORFF: Yes. Filipino immigration to the U.S is sizable, with huge backlogs for family-based immigrant cases. Therefore, an easier avenue was employment. The Philippines was the second-largest origin country for immigrants in 1990 and throughout the first decade of the 21st century. Here too when fraud was detected, the petitions were returned to INS for revocation.

Q: Manila is famous for how bad the traffic is. Did that affect your work as well? Did it take you a very long time to get to work? How did the Consular Section handle that?

KORFF: The embassy ran a home-office-home shuttle service. I used the embassy shuttle because Mike was not working in the embassy; his office building was elsewhere. Given the horrendous traffic, embassy work hours were adjusted to beat the morning and evening rush. When it rained heavily or flooded, it took two-three hours. You went from a fifteen-minute ride to three hours because of the flooding.

Q: Yeah, and you were never close enough to walk?

KORFF: Right.

Q: Yeah, of course this makes the job a bit more difficult because then you know, you can't even start.

KORFF: I had to depend on transportation. If I worked on weekends, I either took a taxi or called the embassy motor pool for a ride.

Q: Now, at this point, you are the equivalent of any other Consular Officer. Did you have supervisory responsibilities?

KORFF: Not really.

Q: So now, you were there from '96 to '98 and you rotated through every aspect of the section, American Citizen Services as well?

KORFF: Yes, I did.

Q: Were there any particular cases that stand out in your mind during that time?

KORFF: There were a lot of repatriation cases, where destitute Americans sought embassy assistance to get them home. Many U.S. veterans went to the Philippines to live on their Social Security benefits, which ran out due to their lifestyle, or health. A particular case I remember was Philander Rodman, who would bring infants for birth registration – when doubts arose, we would request him to take paternity tests. Such were examples of fraud in the American Citizen Services where the claim was this child is a U.S. citizen, because the father is a U.S. citizen.

Q: Yeah. Once again, Manila is also famous for the extent, different types of fraud and the—

KORFF: Yeah!

Q: —Gender fraud. But on the other hand, was it a useful experience for you as you went on in consular work and other work later on?

KORFF: Absolutely. All experience and skills I developed were useful, not only in the current position, but also in my future jobs. The experience gained while rotating through all sections enhanced my well-rounded background.

Q: Now, we will get to that in a moment. But I just wanted to ask, since you are going on to a job different from the consular work while you were in the Philippines, did you do other things outside of the Consular Section, acquire any other background or skills?

KORFF: I did go out to the airport to conduct document checks, training, document training. I came back to the U.S. for some training courses at FSI [Foreign Service Institute]. During the November 1996 APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] meeting, I worked in the busy control room for U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky. President Bill Clinton, who attended the APEC meeting, visited the Embassy and we were happy to extend him a warm welcome.

Q: Now, as this tour comes to an end 1998, you and Michael again are talking about where to go next. Do you recall what happened? Were you talking about going back to the U.S. or another foreign post? What did you decide?

KORFF: In '98 when Michael was looking for his next assignment, which appeared to be Lagos, Nigeria, he wasn't particularly keen on that assignment, so when an immediate position in Kingston, Jamaica, was announced, he bid.

Q: Okay, and you—

KORFF: After we arrived in Jamaica, I had to look for possible employment opportunities.

Q: At that post?

KORFF: Yes.

Q: Okay, how did you find your position in Kingston in 1998?

KORFF: The embassy weekly bulletin, published by the Community Liaison Office, also included job openings for eligible family members. I applied for the advertised Narcotics Affairs Assistant position. Given my background experience in fraud, adding anti-drug work was perfectly up my alley. Although, the old proverb goes "a rolling stone gathers no moss," I certainly picked up tons of moss as I moved around from pillar to post during Michael's career.

Q: Which was helpful in the end.

KORFF: Yes, yes.

Q: All right. What did the job in Jamaica as the Narcotics Affairs Assistant entail? What were your responsibilities?

KORFF: As an alter-ego of the non-resident Regional Narcotics Officer, I planned and developed counterdrug and anti crime programs. I provided statistics for the annual International Narcotics Strategy Report and arranged training for local government officials and law enforcement officers. I was dealing with the Jamaican government, assisting in anti-drug efforts, and obtaining excess U.S. air and sea assets, viz., helicopters, fast-boats, and cutters from the U.S. Coast Guard. The U.S. encouraged the Jamaican government to employ people to eradicate marijuana plants, for which my office monetarily compensated them. I soon detected corruption and fraud whereby ghost workers were listed on the payroll – inflating the number of workers. There would be say 30 workers on the payroll, but in reality, only twenty were actually working – the wages of the other alleged 10 would be pocketed. Sometimes, I would go out there on payday to eyeball the workers being paid. I would question the process and payment, for which I was disliked, they wanted to throw me out. But since I was not an official, I could not be PNG'd [declared Persona non grata]. I began cutting back on compensation based on real workers in the program, which upset them. Although payment was not made with my personal funds, I wanted to ensure that every USG dollar spent from my budget was accounted for.

Q: Now, then the other thing is, we work with countries to reduce the demand locally for drugs so that they don't become consumers. What sort of work did you do in that field?

KORFF: Well, I'm sure the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) played a role in trying to reduce demand for drugs. Night Courts were introduced to handle drug offenders and promote treatment and rehabilitation as an alternative to incarceration. USAID [United States Agency for International Development] and the U.S. Information Service were responsible in training judges to operate night courts.

Q: So then while you were there, did you actually go out with the Coast Guard and see what sort of work they did? Did your work in other words, get you out of the embassy?

KORFF: It did. I used to go out with the Jamaican Coast Guard via helicopter to survey marijuana growing fields and to watch the cutters conducting slash and burn operations. When I paid a courtesy call on the U.S. Coast Guard in Miami, Florida, I was taken on an extensive tour of the port.

Q: And then the other aspect is transshipment. Did you work with the Jamaican government on interdicting transshipment?

KORFF: Drug interdiction was handled solely by the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration].

Q: Okay, okay. Then as this is a three-year job, were there other aspects of it that you liked, that I haven't asked you?

KORFF: I liked the job a lot because I ran the section independently, with a half-time support staff member who managed the budget and paperwork. Unfortunately, it was a contractor position, which meant that I was on a higher pay scale with no retirement benefits. I was a member of the Embassy's country team and prepared the minutes at the Law Enforcement meetings, which were sent to INL in Washington. My supervisor to whom I reported weekly was based in Miami.

Q: And did you, was Jamaica your only, the only part of your job or were you responsible for other islands in the Caribbean?

KORFF: Just Jamaica.

Q: Okay. Okay.

KORFF: Our supervisor, the Narcotics Affairs Officer, was based in Miami, and he was responsible for the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica. The three NAS assistants came together for Regional Meetings with the supervisor, once in Miami and another time in Antigua, Guatemala.

Q: Now, you also gathered statistics for the yearly report on narcotic strategy. Did that create opportunities for you to work with the Jamaican government?

KORFF: I coordinated between Miami and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), an agency that reports to the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights within the Department of State. Under the umbrella of its general mission of developing policies and programs to combat international narcotics and crime, INL plays an important role in the training of partner nation security forces.

INL programs support two of the Department of State's strategic goals: (1) to reduce the entry of illegal drugs into the United States; and (2) to minimize the impact of international crime on the United States and its citizens. Counternarcotics and anticrime programs also complement counterterrorism efforts, both directly and indirectly, by promoting modernization of and supporting operations by foreign criminal justice systems and law enforcement agencies charged with the counter-terrorism mission.

The International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) is an annual report by the Department of State to Congress prepared in accordance with the Foreign Assistance Act. It describes the efforts of key countries to attack all aspects of the international drug trade in a calendar year.

Q: Then that's fine. I was just curious if you know, as part of the job, you ended up having many government contacts and sort of had an opportunity to see how the Jamaican government operated.

KORFF: I worked closely with the Minister for Justice, the Jamaican Constabulary (Police), and Coast Guard. Holding the purse strings allowed me to enjoy a unique status within Jamaican law enforcement and ministry.

Q: Very good. Okay. But the other thing, of course, about this job is you've now picked up an additional skill. Quite valuable for U.S. embassies or even offices in Washington, as you and your husband move around. This position ended in 2001. Were you in Jamaica during the attack on 2001 on 9/11?

KORFF: No, I was back in the U.S. because I had to undergo surgery, prior to joining my husband on his next assignment in Tanzania.

Q: Now I, I hope you recuperated well from the surgery and so on. Because you do move on then with your husband after 2001 to your next assignment. How did that happen? How did the choice and the move to your next assignment work out?

KORFF: Mike was assigned to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Like other small posts, employment opportunities for spouses were few.

Q: Okay, yeah. Yes, understood.

KORFF: It's hard for the spouse to find a job and do something that he or she likes.

Q: Yes.

KORFF: In Dar es Salaam, the RSO hired me temporarily to fill-in for his secretary, who had gone to the U.S. for training. Prior to the Ambassador's arrival at post, he wanted a secretary, as his private-sector assistant couldn't go overseas at the time. I submitted my application to the Washington desk for the Ambassador's consideration. I later learned that although the Ambassador found my application favorable, the folks at the Department were not keen on placing a spouse in that position, especially since the new Ambassador was a political appointee and unfamiliar with how the State Department functioned. They discouraged him and offered the services of a seasoned foreign service secretary, recommended by the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], instead. Long story short, a few months later, both the DCM and the secretary were out, and I was hired along with a new DCM.

Q: Yes.

KORFF: We got along famously while I worked for him. He tried to accomplish a lot and was very enthusiastic when he first arrived. Unfortunately, the government officials in Tanzania did not move at the same pace, which began to frustrate him. He raised funds in the U.S. to build Habitat for Humanity houses for teachers at a school run by an American nun in Tanzania. My background in visas helped field calls that came into the ambassador's office. Callers were upset and wanted to speak to the ambassador, thinking the Ambassador could flip consular officers' decision in their relative's visa case. The

Ambassador had complete faith in my handling visa calls; therefore, I would not put such calls through to him. At official functions, if he was approached about a visa matter, he would direct them to speak with me in his office. I would then discuss some cases with the Consular Chief and try to resolve cases one way or another. I knew that if the explanation was based on the eligibility of the visa application rather than the applicant, the explanation was accepted, and we moved on.

Q: Yeah! Wonderful.

KORFF: I often got to travel with the ambassador, even on out-of-town trips. His contacts were my contacts. They knew my position with the ambassador.

Q: That can be, you know, a very important job. And it sounds like you really made the most of it.

KORFF: I sure did. I enjoyed his company and work ethic. He was very fair and hardworking. He wanted to achieve a lot but found a good deal of push back or reluctance. Over time, he became disenchanted and began to lose interest. And then he was ready to leave. I think he did leave a little earlier than he should have, due to frustration.

Q: What were the highlights that you recall as the ambassador's Secretary/Special Assistant?

KORFF: I coordinated travel and representational events, and acted as liaison for agencies within the Mission, U.S., and Tanzanian Governments. Oh, the biggest highlight was travel. Tanzania was such a fantastic place with all the safaris. As a member of the Ambassador's entourage to various official events, I enjoyed the VIP treatment the delegation was given. So that was a lot of fun!

Q: Is there a particular project that the ambassador had to or wanted to see accomplished that sticks out in your mind?

KORFF: Yes. His goal was to obtain desks for classrooms and housing for teachers at a school run by an American nun. Considering that, he raised funds in South Carolina. In addition, we held an art auction at the Embassy with donations we solicited from local businesses. Tanzania's noted wood carvings were received as donations for our auction. Donations were both in cash and kind – making for a huge success. We were able to give that money to the school. Now, that was a big achievement! As I had mentioned earlier, we received expertise from Habitat for Humanity to build those affordable houses for the teachers.

Q: And, the other thing as the Secretary's Special Assistant, you're talking to all the sections of the embassy. What was that like? How, what did you learn from that perch up in the ambassador's office?

KORFF: The Ambassador referred to me as his gatekeeper. That meant I had to carefully manage his internal and external appointments, allowing down-time for reading and responding to action items. Everybody wanted to see him. There were times I had to juggle his appointments when urgent issues came up. So scheduling was very important to ensure that the driver knew when, where, and how to get the Ambassador to his next meeting.

Q: Sure.

KORFF: And of course, he would get waylaid also on his way out of the embassy, just walking to his car. Invariably, someone or other would stop him with requests or want to get his views on something. Sometimes I would walk with him, which made him feel like I was being overprotective. To avoid nepotism, I supervised the RMO [Regional Medical Officer], instead of the DCM, as his wife worked as a nurse in the Health Unit of the Embassy. I also supervised the Protocol Assistant and the Ambassador's chauffeur.

Q: Okay, now, were there any VIP visits? Because often that becomes a major thing for the ambassador.

KORFF: Yes, I prepared for the high-level visit of the Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services. Among other visits, I recall a couple of U.S. Senators and a Congressman, the Director of the Voice of America, and the head of OBO [Overseas Buildings Operations], who came for the opening of the New Embassy.

Q: Yeah, yeah. People don't realize it, but the Ambassador's Secretary often has many skills and many things that she or he has to remember. Just even the routes that the ambassador takes in order to get to places.

KORFF: I was responsible for coordinating with other sections while safe routing specifically for the Ambassador's travel was reviewed by the Regional Security Office, taking into consideration if there were any planned demonstrations or other events around town. The Ambassador's schedule was shared with only a few senior officials and a sanitized version was given to the Ambassador's chauffeur.

Q: Yeah. It's not a well understood job, how important this is for the smooth functioning of the embassy. Because if the ambassador gets tied up and doesn't get to the places that have been scheduled, things go wrong very quickly.

KORFF: That's right.

Q: All right. But, so it, it sounds like you had some fun with the job, and that it also gave you additional skills in just understanding how an entire embassy works.

KORFF: Yes. I enjoyed being in the Front Office and having a birds-eye view of everything that was going on.

Q: Where do you go next from Tanzania?

KORFF: Mike retired, and we returned to our home in Virginia in August 2004. Upon our return, I alerted the Passport Office, where I had worked earlier, that I was back in the Washington area and would be interested in working there again. Although there were no vacancies, I was asked to apply to the Human Resources Office and told that they would find a suitable place for me. Apparently, several people had written glorious recommendations that truly impressed them. In a couple of weeks, I received a call from the Human Resources Office offering me a position in the Office of Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs. I gratefully accepted and was hired without interview!

Q: Now, at this point, are you in this U.S. Civil Service? Or what status were you in?

KORFF: I was U.S. Civil Service.

Q: Okay.

KORFF: During my first job in the Passport office, 1990-1992, I was hired as a U.S. Civil Service (CS) employee, having fulfilled the requirement of 52 weeks of overseas U.S. Government service. I had more than a year and that's how my Civil Service career began. When we returned to Washington in 1994-1996, I was rehired in the CS and my previous frozen service credits were added to the current employment.

Q: And so, starting, I guess, in 2004, you entered the Civil Service in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. Let's begin there in 2004. What were your responsibilities as you arrived?

KORFF: I rejoined the Civil Service in 2004, and all my prior service credits were added to my current employment status. As a Citizens Service Specialist, East Asia and Pacific Division, in the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, [OCS], Bureau of Consular Affairs, I covered several countries and my responsibilities included Post oversight and support for emergency and non-emergency services and security awareness. I guided Post for possible evacuation of U.S. citizens when the military coup in Fiji became imminent. While an evacuation was not necessary, I coordinated warden messages and represented our Bureau at high-level crisis preparedness meetings. I assisted in adjudicating a significant backlog of passport applications at the Washington Passport Agency, caused by the new Western Hemisphere initiative that required U.S. citizens to travel to the U.S. from Mexico and Canada on U.S. passports. I played the key role of Consul General during a week-long Marine Expedition Exercise at Camp Lejeune, NC. I also provided leadership and support while serving temporarily as country adoption officer in the Office of Children's Issues. I also assisted in the evacuation of U.S. citizens during the Lebanon crisis.

Q: But now was the consular Bureau divided by geographical area?

KORFF: Yes. I was in the East Asia and Pacific Division, American Citizens Services.

Q: What were you responsible for?

KORFF: I provided policy guidance and support to posts in Japan, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Samoa, and Brunei. I monitored and supported the administration of emergency and non-emergency consular services to U.S. citizens residing in or traveling to countries in my portfolio. I served as a conduit between posts and the interagency process, answering complex citizenship and nationality questions. And I served in the OCS Duty Program and on Consular Task Forces. I was the OCS SharePoint administrator. I served short temporary duty assignments in Tokyo [2011], after the major earthquake to fill a staffing gap during the summer, Guangzhou [2013] Beijing [2015] – assisted in their summer visa workload.

Q: So this is interesting, because even though you're in the office of American Citizen Services, they know you have the—

KORFF: Visa background. The Bureau tried to give Civil Service employees an opportunity to do short TDY tours, thereby allowing them to gain a better understanding of how consular sections overseas worked. For CS employees who had never done visa work, a few days of training was provided at high visa issuing posts in China.

Q: —Yeah. And they're willing to tap that for temporary duty.

KORFF: Yes, I was fortunate to have had visa background, which helped me offer my services to overseas posts. Each time I was away on temporary duty, my portfolio was split among colleagues in my division, so the burden wouldn't fall on one person.

Q: Right. Now, once again, let's take just a moment, this is now 2004. You are in the State Department. How has the information technology revolution changed the nature of your work, has it made it easier or harder? What did you notice about the changes with all the computerization, email, and so on?

KORFF: The most important thing that Secretary of State Colin Powell did was to allow us to have access to both the classified [up to secret level] and unclassified systems at our desks. Previously, we had to go to a secure location to read classified information. We were able to switch back and forth between the two systems making it very helpful and timesaving. For documents that were of higher classification, we would walk over to the Department of State and read them in a secure setting.

Q: And then the other big change, of course, after 2001, there began to be many, many more security checks and aspects of security that were changed and enhanced. How did that have an effect on you?

KORFF: 2001, after the 9/11 incident, a new section called the Crisis Management and Strategy [CMS] office was added to the Operations Center to support task forces and help the Department manage and learn from crises. Today, all of Ops works together to

respond to major events, both in the United States and abroad. CMS also provides preventative and long-term assistance to posts. From reviewing crisis preparedness plans and developing dynamic plans with posts approaching crises to managing 24/7 task forces and mass evacuation planning, CMS ensures posts have the skills and support they need to respond to any kind of emergency. In 2007, I served as Program Officer for a year as resident expert on consular issues and was primary liaison between the Bureau of Consular Affairs, and the Secretary of State's Crisis Management/Operations Center.

Q: Was that because it's attached to the operation center, was that a shift job? Were you on a sort of 24-hour, different shifts?

KORFF: Not in the Crisis Management office, there were no shifts, rather they did it in the Ops Center. The only time I was on shifts was when there was a task force operational, then the task force was 24/7. I served on several crisis task forces.

Q: And during that year, you were there from 2007-2008. What did you find to be the most important thing or the most memorable thing, since this is a relatively new tool, having this crisis management office?

KORFF: Knowing everything that was going on in the world in real time and having access to the topmost briefing materials, was very, very helpful. After every crisis, CMS also analyzed the Department's response to crises and disseminated lessons learned to ensure that posts are safer, well prepared, and ready for future challenges.

Q: And did they attack your particular skills with knowledge of South Asia, Hindi, and the fact that you've lived in, you know, India and Bangladesh?

KORFF: Not really. I managed the very challenging portfolios of South-Central Asia (SCA) and Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA). During my tenure, the political situations in Pakistan and Bangladesh were extremely volatile; WHA weathered three category 5 hurricanes requiring significant engagement – prompting contingency planning, emergency preparedness, and evacuation implementation. I supported and managed Crisis Task Forces and conducted crisis management training. I emphasized the “No Double Standard” policy, ensuring that private U.S. citizens were aware of specific terrorist threat information that had come to the missions' attention. I created a collaborative web portal during the period of rapid transition in Pakistan where terrorist violence shadowed and political uncertainty threatened to derail the country's stability and democratic prospects.

Q: Ah, interesting.

KORFF: For a couple of months in the summer, due to a staffing gap, I was asked to manage two hemispheres, which was exhausting and stressful.

Q: Wow. Yeah. So I mean, this is a relatively new set of skills for you. That you hadn't done before? Yeah. Um, wow. But it did last only a year. And then where did you go from there?

KORFF: Back to my office at Overseas Citizen Services.

Q: Okay.

KORFF: After a couple of years, when a colleague of mine in the Office of Children's Issues, decided to do the one-year stint in CMS, I took over for four months her portfolio on international adoptions.

Q: Sure.

KORFF: That assignment got to be tedious quickly because potential adoptive parents wanting to adopt were impatient, not realizing that I was not holding up the adoption process. Many orphan children who were from Poland and other countries were disabled, needing more attention. Some new adoptive parents who adopted a disabled child found it stressful, so neglect crept in along with wanting to return the child. Since legally adopted children could not be returned to their home country, they were taken over by social services in that state. In a Russian adoption case, when a seven-year-old child was sent back to Russia by the adoptive parents, that led to a huge international issue. The government of Russia placed a moratorium on adoptions for a long time.

Q: Yeah, yeah. There were many, many problems with international adoptions.

KORFF: Yes, yes. Now back in Overseas Citizen Services: if an American was arrested overseas, of course their family members in the U.S. would call and ask if something could be done to get him out of jail. I would try to explain that the foreign country was a sovereign nation with rules and regulations that we had to respect but ensure that the person was treated humanely. Then there was an American who committed suicide overseas. The distraught parents insisted their son was murdered and wanted us to get the foreign government to investigate or send U.S. authorities to investigate. The U.S. cannot investigate unless expressly requested by the foreign authorities, which, in this case, they did not.

Q: Absolutely. Now, once again, as time goes by, are the tools that you have in order to work with these very distant overseas posts getting better? Are there aspects of your job that are getting easier?

KORFF: The biggest drawback for some was the time difference between the U.S and posts in our portfolios. However, it was perfect for me, because if posts would query me during their workday, I would respond during mine which meant they had an answer from me the next day. This system worked well in non-emergency cases, while in emergency cases, posts would contact the after-hours OCS duty officer.

Q: Yeah. Did they, did the consular office give you different geographic areas? Or did you stay in the Asia/Pacific?

KORFF: I was one of five officers and remained in the East Asia and Pacific division, American Citizen Services [ACS]. The Office of Citizens Services encompassed five geographic divisions – AF, EAP, EUR, NESCA, and WHA.

Q: Now, also, over time, because you've acquired so many skills, and worked in so many different places, you begin to become considered for awards. And do you recall which awards were for you the most satisfying?

KORFF: All awards were satisfying knowing that my work and efforts were appreciated. Doing something I enjoyed was fulfilling in addition to being able to resolve problems as best I could. Serving on crisis task forces was required as well as serving on the OCS duty officer roster, one week at a time. As the duty officer I worked from home and took emergency calls from posts, or Americans in the U.S. or overseas.

Q: Interesting. Now, but as you are getting, you know, more and more experience and you're working longer in the consular bureau. Do you take on supervisory responsibilities?

KORFF: No, I had no supervisory responsibility. Each division had a chief and a deputy, who was always a civil service employee with seniority. Since Michael had retired again from his other jobs, I decided to retire as well so we could pursue other interests together.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Now, let's look back then on the career path that you had, while you were taking positions, and so on, did you see changes in how the State Department treated spouses? Were you getting more help? Or how would you describe the treatment spouses got over that period of time?

KORFF: Employment opportunities for spouses got progressively better, the State Department was doing a lot more for spouses than they did when I was overseas. I had to aggressively pursue employment opportunities and managed to persevere. When I was hired as a contractor in Kingston, it took me almost two years in getting INL to convert my position to a family member position that provided retirement benefits. Unfortunately, my supervisor was kind of lazy, he didn't push the paperwork forward. Finally, a month or two before we were reassigned to another post, my efforts were successful. The person who filled my position after I left, greatly benefited from my efforts. Sadly, my contractor service could not be counted toward retirement. However, several years down the road, I was able to buy in retirement service credits for temporary employment stints as well as my time working in the U.S. Army Civilian Personnel Office, which had not been counted toward retirement. All in all, when I retired doing this rolling stone job, I completed twenty-six years.

Q: Wow, that is yeah, quite a lot.

KORFF: Yeah, yeah. A full career. I think Mike completed twenty-six years too.

Q: That number is certainly excellent. But the other thing I'm curious about is you manage to work very regularly. Did you see that other spouses also wanted to work at opportunities? Or is it, you know, your own determination and your own willingness to be flexible, that helps you accomplish this?

KORFF: It must work both ways. My determination and willingness to be flexible in accepting any available position helped me move ahead. And because he clearly understood my plight, Mike was very sympathetic toward other spouses, and he would hire spouses in his office, which also gave them a chance to work. Conversation at home tended to be boring while I was unemployed. Once I started working, my encounters got interesting, especially in the Fraud Office. Oh, good stories from the Fraud Office.

Q: Sure.

KORFF: My colleagues would tell me that they'd threaten to hand the people referred to the Fraud Unit to me when they were reluctant to tell the truth. In most of the cases, I was able to get them to confess their actions and have them provide an affidavit referencing their fraud. Based on such confessions, they were banned from receiving a visa again.

Q: Right. Right. Yeah. Once you lie—

KORFF: And I sound like a terrible person, don't I?

Q: Well, your —

KORFF: I was always tough.

Q: Yeah, I know you're adjudicating U.S. law. And if you're violating the law, that's you have every right and you know, you're expected to apply it. But then also, were you able to maintain a reasonable work/life balance for your family?

KORFF: When we went to Manila, our son was off at college in the U.S., so it was just the two of us. Having no family nearby, it was tough on our son especially during school breaks, he had no place to go. He did get to visit us once in Manila and again in Jamaica.

Q: But for yourselves, as well, were you able to find time for recreation and you know, just to unwind?

KORFF: Well, because of Mike's position, we had a lot of representational events to attend or to host. We traveled around a little and took our R&R in Australia.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Because obviously, that's part of how, you know, you manage two working spouses in the Foreign Service. Even when one is not an officer.

KORFF: And, especially when we were overseas, I didn't bring work home, it was left in the office. But once we returned to the U.S. and I was able to access my work computer, sometimes I would spend a couple of hours in the evenings sifting through emails and flagging priority items for the morning. Every morning there was a short ten minute pow-wow at which each officer could raise anything important in our portfolios that our Chief should know before she headed to the Division meeting at 9 a.m. When my posts were open, and if I was online, sometimes I would respond right away.

Q: Yeah, it is the two-edged sword. You have access and ability. And then, on the other hand, it creates opportunities for work and more work and more work.

KORFF: People assume when one works remotely, the person tends to do less, but not really; rather you're motivated to have the access. There are distractions with kids, and there are some people who abuse the system. Since I was not required to work in the evenings, I chose to spend a couple of hours on my personal time.

Q: Yeah. Now, if you were advising spouses who are now entering the Foreign Service with an officer, what advice would you give them?

KORFF: I would say, look out, persevere. See what's there. Push ahead, read the regulations. And it doesn't matter if you've never done it before. There's always a first time, you learn. All experience matters. It all adds up. Count your blessings, big and small. Look at me. I've done so many different things in my twenty-six years. When I first met Mike, I didn't even know I was going to join the State Department and yet ended up spending twenty-six years, with a retirement pension. How great is that?

Q: Yeah. Now, in retirement, are you using any of your skills in other kinds of work?

KORFF: Yes, every time we're on cruises, I get a chance to enlighten people about the Department of State's Travel.State.gov website, an excellent resource to review, prior to traveling overseas. I can talk about my experience of living overseas with people. They love to hear my stories, without mentioning names, talk about certain incidents. Some of the stories are very helpful and informative.

Q: And how has the department ever called you back for some kind of short emergency assistance?

KORFF: Not really, because I think they are fully staffed.

Q: Yes.

KORFF: In the Civil Service, they don't really have the WAE program that retired FSOs have.

Q: Well, then we have come to the end of my questions. Are there any other thoughts or reflections that you want to add? At the end of the end of this interview, and having been a Foreign Service spouse all this time?

KORFF: It's been, I think, a great adventure, because it's broadened my perspective to achieve my goals. Had I not met Mike, my life would have been totally different. Looking back, I see every place has been wonderful. Every job has taught me something, making me a better, tougher person. I've become more independent and can stand up for myself. I have no qualms about saying no; I don't easily roll-over and agree. In other words, I stand my ground until the agreement or discussion convinces me to change my mind. My daughter-in-law noticed this trait in me from the very beginning. Usually, my first answer is no, then later I might concede. That's my legacy.

Q: I don't think that is so unusual.

KORFF: Now that I'm retired, I don't need to do things I don't enjoy just to please others, the only exception is family. I know my strengths and weaknesses. My time is special, and I like it that way.

Q: Alright, very good.

KORFF: My husband on the other hand, being diplomatic, has a harder time saying no. He'll take on responsibilities which leads him to become overwhelmed.

Q: So there's a bit of good cop bad cop in your relationship.

KORFF: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: Well, thank you so much for sharing your experience as a spouse in the Foreign Service. And we're really very grateful that you took the time to record this with us.

End of interview