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

NICHOLAS J. MANRING

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
Initial interview date: April 5,2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Retirement

Retired to Seattle, Washington November 2018

INTERVIEW

[NOTE: The transcript below is more extensive than the taped interview because Nicholas Manring edited and added to the initial, verbatim transcript to make this record more detailed and complete.]

Q: So this is April the fifth. We are beginning our first interview with Nicholas Manring and Nicholas, we always begin by asking you where and when you were born.

MANRING: I was born November 11th, 1953 in Newport, Rhode Island.

Q: Okay. Did your family stay there or did you move as a child?

MANRING: My father was career Navy starting in 1943 and he continued in the U.S. Navy through my high school years. We didn't stay in Newport long – perhaps a year or so - after I was born there and thereafter moved places mostly around the United States when I was a child.

Q: Okay. Where of the places you moved would you think of as home?

MANRING: I went to high school in Norfolk, Virginia and also in San Diego County, California (Fallbrook). However, both my parents were from eastern Washington state, a very small farming community, right near the Idaho border (the town of Garfield in Whitman County). That area was always a home base for us. Both my grandmothers lived in eastern Washington as did most of my aunts, uncles, and cousins. So I've always considered myself somebody from eastern Washington state.

Q: How did your parents meet?

MANRING: My parents met in high school in that small town.

Q: A lot of people these days are going back and looking at their ancestry. Have you done any of that or are there, is there any story back there to tell?

MANRING: Family history is really one of my passions and I've been delving into it for several decades. I started in high school (the summer of 1970), talking to older relatives and just jotting down what they would say, discussing old photographs, family Bible entries, and such. Nowadays, there's more and more coming online as many older, public records are being put online and made available to the public. So I am pretty regularly looking for family tree information. I think my family is a pretty typical mixture of melting pot America. On my father's side, part of the family has been here since I believe

about 1619 in Virginia. On my mother's side, her father's family immigrated from Poland in the late eighteen hundreds. There's a real mixture of European immigration to the United States in my heritage, as I said, from the early 1600s, right through to 1940.

Q: How did everybody ended up in eastern Washington state?

MANRING: That gets some somewhat complicated. On my dad's side, it's fairly easy, on his father's side: his grandfather and family came to Washington - then Washington Territory - in the summer of 1878 from NW Missouri, where they had been farming. They went west on the Oregon Trail via the proverbial wagon train for three months from June to September. They took up a homestead and settled on what would later become the edge of the town of Garfield. There's even a very short Manring Street in Garfield that once was the road up to their homestead. That's my father's father's side. My father's mother's side came west by train from Iowa in 1902. They were farmers as well and bought a farm not too far out of Spokane, near Cheney, Washington. That's my father's side. My mother's side is a little bit more complicated. Her parents, met and married in Tientsin, China where her father was stationed in the U.S. Army in the 1920s.

In the 1920s, one of our, if not our largest, overseas Army base was in Tientsin, China. My grandfather was stationed there. He met his wife, who was a Russian emigrant to China. There, they married (in 1926 in the presence of a U.S. Consular Officer) and later that year, had my mother. In the late 1920s, their marriage fell apart and my mother was adopted by another American couple living in Tientsin. My adoptive grandparents were a school teacher from Garfield, Washington and her husband who had been a Marine at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing in the 1920s. My mother was raised by them in Tientsin, then later in Peking (now Beijing). Then, in 1940, when the Japanese were in control of northern China, my adoptive grandparents thought they should send my mother to a safer place. So they sent her back to be with relatives in the United States in the winter of 1940-1941. That safer place was where my adoptive grandmother's sister lived: Garfield, Washington, my dad's home town. So that's how my mother came to be in eastern Washington in the same small town as my dad.

Q: Okay. So taken by your story there, there could be so many more threads to pull on there, but I'm sure you, you've done a lot of great research and you will be able to go into that with your family and in much greater detail. From your point of view though, in your high school experience, were you also involved with extracurricular activities, boy scouts or you know, other, other interests?

MANRING: Absolutely - particularly when we lived in Norfolk. We were maybe five or six blocks from the beach. So I spent a lot of time at the beach. It was a great recreational pass-time for me, whether it was walking or swimming or fishing, it was just nice to have the beach right there. I was also involved in Boy Scouts; I was an eagle scout. In high school, I was in all kinds of clubs: French club, German club, and I was on the high school debate team. I enjoyed foreign languages. Those are the things that I remember most about my high school activities.

Q: Did your mother's birth parents - her biological parents - ever end up in the United States?

MANRING: Her mother did not. Her mother died, I think it was from pneumonia, in about 1944 in Tientsin, China, during World War II. My mom's father did return to the United States as part of his normal U.S. Army rotation and lived in the U.S. until he died in California in the early 1960s.

Q: Okay. Now do you have brothers and sisters?

MANRING: Yes, I have. I'm in the middle. I have one sister who is two years older than I am: Rebecca Manring. She is a, as of this afternoon, a full professor at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. I have a brother, Keith Manring, who is nine years younger than I. He is a science teacher also in Indiana, in Indianapolis. [NB: In the summer of 2020, my brother, his wife, and youngest daughter moved to Oregon.]

Q: Okay. And now I'm in high school. Did you, obviously you traveled around the United States but did your father's occupation also take you overseas at any point?

MANRING: It did and I think that's what sparked my initial interest in the Foreign Service. During his naval career, he had a two-year assignment to the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) attached to our embassy in Brussels, Belgium. July, 1963 to probably July, 1965. That was my first experience learning a foreign language, living overseas, and getting to know the embassy community that we had then in Brussels. That was before NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) headquarters was there, so it was a much smaller United States government presence in Brussels. So yes, to answer your question, my dad did have one overseas assignment, in Belgium. We also lived in Honolulu, Hawaii from spring 1958 to spring 1960. That was pretty exotic at that time. That's also where I started school: kindergarten and first-grade. We went to Hawaii by ship from San Francisco and when we returned in 1960, we flew.

Q: Now when you were a kid also, did your mother work?

MANRING: By and large, no. Our family was a pretty traditional American family where the father was the breadwinner and was employed full-time and my mother was a homemaker. She did work occasionally as a substitute teacher after she completed her college degree, in various places where we were, but really not a lot of her time was spent that way.

Q: Now you said this was the first experience living overseas, that that sort of began to get you interested in international service and I guess also the Foreign Service because you would have known from the embassy what a foreign service officer was and so on. Even back then when you were a teenager, did it sort of convince you that was going to be your career path?

MANRING: Well, it didn't convince me, but it was certainly on my radar screen. I thought it sounded pretty interesting. The families and the kids that I knew from an embassy background, and the overseas ex-pat community, U.S. embassy and other foreign embassies, seem to have a pretty nice life and seem to enjoy it. They certainly had a lot of opportunities to see things and experience things that most of us in the United States didn't have the opportunity to see or experience.

Q: From Brussels, did your family do a lot of traveling?

MANRING: We did. Every vacation, my parents were assiduous in getting us out and seeing not just Belgium, but the rest of Europe as well.

Q: And um, what about reading at home? Did you read it all for pleasure?

MANRING: Absolutely. I think a standard part of my childhood was visiting the public library, and we always received books as presents for birthdays and Christmas. I've always been a slow reader. My mother would check out stacks of books. My sister would check out stacks of books. They're both avid and fast readers. I checked out, you know, one or two books. But we all enjoyed reading. I enjoyed reading and at least as long back as I can remember, always had books that we were working on reading. Before I was old enough to read on my own, my parents read books to me. I remember being enamored of Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island, which my dad read to me when I was about six years-old. In addition, my parents always subscribed to at least one newspaper where we lived, and usually a number of magazines such as National Geographic and Time. A big treat for me when we lived in the United States was getting the New York Times on Sunday. I was amazed at how thick it was.

Q: Now in this period when you're growing up, were there any other particular recollections you have that were very vivid about and very formative, you mean formative, formative for you at, you know, as you're growing to adulthood?

MANRING: Well certainly the time that we spent with extended family made an impression on me because moving around a lot, we didn't see a lot of our relatives on a regular basis. So when we would, whether it was Christmas time or summer vacation, those were pretty special times. I know that I always enjoyed seeing relatives even elderly - cousins my age or a great aunt and uncle who may have been up in their eighties. Until I was in high school, I also didn't realize how large my dad's family was. He had seven brothers and sisters and each of his parents had at least that many as well.

Q: Did you work at all a part time or anything while you were in high school?

MANRING: I did summer lawn mowing and for most of a school year, and I tutored German a little. I think that was it for high school work.

Q: I'm going through school and so on. Are your parents talking to you about college or are you exploring it? How did, how did that go?

MANRING: Absolutely. I think from a very young age, it must've been instilled in me as it was in my brother and my sister that we were college-bound. "You're supposed to go to college." That's what I guess middle class kids did in the 1960s and 1970s. Certainly there was no question in my mind that after high school there would be college of some sort.

Q: Now given how you were moving around, was there one language that you had learned that you felt particularly strong?

MANRING: You mean one foreign language? Yes, for me it was French. I had a very, very little bit of Spanish when we lived in southern California in the early 1960s, but it was more like a kid's class on a weekend or during the summer. French, was the language we learned when we were in Belgium and that stuck with me through high school and even into my first year at college. Ironically, as we'll see in this interview, I never had a Foreign Service assignment in a location where French was the language.

Q: Aside from all of these were, were there other communities of interest that you formed, you know, when you were, when you were growing up? I church or for, or anything else?

MANRING: Not really. My parents and our family did attend church, I'd say regularly, but it varied between being a naval base chapel and a Presbyterian church in the community, depending on what was available and what my parents particularly liked. I didn't belong myself to church organizations and also really had no strong interest in sports. I did work as a volunteer in the summer/fall of 1968 for the campaign of Dr. G. William Whitehurst, who was running for Congress in Norfolk, Virginia. I enjoyed that and it helped me understand politics at a local level. Also, during my sophomore and junior years in high school, I was active in my high school's debate team.

Q: Now, so now as you're approaching graduation from high school, what are you thinking about for college in terms of what kind of program you're interested in or location or you know, so on.

MANRING: During the summer between my junior and senior year in high school (summer 1970), I applied and was accepted in a National Science Foundation-sponsored summer program on forestry at the University of Washington in Seattle.

For that program, I spent a couple of months in Seattle on the University of Washington (UW) campus. That made a really big impression. Seattle's a beautiful place. I had relatives there. The campus was stunning. The people that I was interacting with in the UW's College of Forest Resources were fascinating. So that really clicked for me. Because of that experience, the University of Washington was one of two colleges I applied to. I was accepted there and that's where I went for my first year.

Q: As you arrived there, um, what was their kind of culture shock from, you know, coming from a whole variety of places around the world and now kind of settling in for four years in, in one location?

MANRING: I really didn't feel much culture shock because by and large I'd been raised in the United States, with the exception of two years in Brussels. You know, in most cities in the U.S., you walk down the street and you're going to see the same kind of fast food restaurants and cars, the same programs on TV, etc. Plus, I had been in Seattle and on the UW campus for the summer of 1970, so it was a pretty familiar place to me.

Q: Okay.

MANRING: However, probably everybody goes through a big transitional shock from being in a family situation at home to being on one's own with peers. That was an adjustment, but I was ready to leave home. I suspect that's the sort of adjustment that everybody goes through growing up then going off to college, but I enjoyed it.

Q: And what year did you arrive in college?

MANRING: The fall of 1971. September is when the university started.

Q: So there had been a fair amount of time for there to build up the kind of political countercultural activities and movements if they were going to be there. Did, was there much of that on the campus?

MANRING: At that time, there was there was a lot of focus on the Vietnam War. There had been anti-war bombings of the military training facilities (ROTC) on the UW campus, including at least through May 1970.

Q: I imagine you arrive and go into a dormitory or did you pledge with a fraternity?

MANRING: No, I was in a dormitory.

Q: Then were you thinking about a major at this point?

MANRING: You know, when I started college, I was interested in political science and so that was my declared major initially. This hearkened back to some interest in foreign affairs and government based on all the exposure I had through my dad's career, our time in Belgium, and my volunteer work on the one Congressional campaign in Norfolk, Virginia. I also had a pretty strong interest in botany from my summer program at UW in 1970. So, I started off as a political science major; that lasted I think one quarter and then I shifted to botany, which was a stronger pull for me at that time.

At UW, I then did two quarters as a botany major, which I have to say I really enjoyed much more than political science. I realized, however, that a botany degree would lead me into some kind of a research career. I didn't want a career where I would be confined

inside a building, doing research. So I looked for how else I could channel my interest in in plants. I looked at Washington State University on the other side of Washington state and coincidentally 30 miles away from my parents' hometown. It had a large agriculture program, which seemed more interesting to me at the time that the botany path at UW.

So, after my first year at the University of Washington, I transferred to Washington State University (WSU) with a major of general agriculture. I finished the rest of my undergraduate university studies there. My grandfather attended WSU in 1892 also as an agriculture student, and most of my dad's brothers and sisters did as well during the 1920s and 1930s. That made me third generation there.

Q: Now, what kind of studies your classes would make up a major in agriculture?

MANRING: That's a good question. You can focus on something like agricultural economics or animal husbandry, for example, if you want to go on to veterinary school. My major was general agriculture, so I had classes pertaining to soils, classes pertaining to growing grains, classes on fruit production, and classes on the economic side of the agricultural industry. I had a real smattering of different courses. I found it absolutely fascinating I have to say. However, my interest was in sustainable, organic agriculture. That was too advanced for WSU at that time, where mass mono-culture and use of herbicides and pesticides was considered part-and-parcel of modern agriculture. Nonetheless, I was able to glean from my courses the basic knowledge on animal husbandry, pomology (fruit trees), soil care, etc.

Q: Were those courses subsequently helpful to you? In the foreign service?

MANRING: Not very much. There have been rare occasions where I was doing a visa interview with somebody who may have been a farmer or somebody who was an agronomist. I could ask some questions to sort of test the veracity or bonafides of these applicants. But really, no, I would say that, studying agriculture didn't contribute much to my Foreign Service career. Along those lines, however, I do remember that my first serious visa over-stay in the United States was a Mexican agronomist. I thought he was a safe bet for a visitor's visa because I felt I knew his line of work well. Several months later, I received the overstay report on him from our Immigration & Naturalization Service. That was an unpleasant surprise. The agriculture degree did help me in my law practice since many of my clients were farmers; I could understand their work and lifestyles, and knew the vocabulary, so to speak.

The agriculture background was, however, helpful to me when I practiced law. It provided an understanding of terms used in leases, estate work, etc.

Q: Okay. Given that major though, had you ever considered working in agricultural development, let's say for USAID or take a tour in the Peace Corps?

MANRING: Certainly the Peace Corps was an option, but, for whatever reason, I really wasn't interested in that. At the time, I was not aware of the career opportunities in

USAID or one of their contractors. I think had I known that that was a possibility, I might have focused a little bit more on that. During the end of my undergraduate studies and for a year after that, I lived in a ghost town, Elberton, about 25 miles north of the WSU campus. I was helping the county, which was converting the town into a park, to document the town's history and also living a lifestyle that allowed me to garden, raise chickens, and to a large extent, live off the land. The ghost town had been an orcharding center around 1900, so there were lots of remnants of old orchards still there in the 1970s. From there, I went on to law school at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville from in June of 1977 through December, 1979, when I graduated. In retrospect, I think law is an excellent foundation for any kind of government work, and certainly that was tremendously helpful for my later work in the Foreign Service, especially with visa work and for my tour in State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs.

Q: Now, while you were in college, did you consider, um, a semester or a summer abroad or did you take any opportunity for that?

MANRING: You know, I didn't. That was always in the background that that was a possibility, but certainly was not pushed by my university. Plus, at that time, I was totally content being here in the United States.

Q: Oh, how did you decide on going to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville?

MANRING: I was looking for some kind of out-of-state school. The best law school in Washington state is the University of Washington in Seattle and I wasn't interested in living in Seattle again at that point. I was looking for someplace out of state where the law school started in the summer. I was anxious to get started and didn't want to wait until a fall start. And, I wanted someplace which had relatively low out-of-state tuition. The University of Tennessee fit both of those criteria. Plus, I was curious about the Appalachian region of the country, from my interest in history. That region had a reputation of being an area where you could still see log cabins, where there were Civil War battlefields, and generally being a step or two behind the more modernized urban centers of the country. So, I applied there, was accepted and that's where I went.

Q: Okay. Now what sort of law were you thinking about or at that time you, you really didn't decide you were, you were going to see what, what grabbed you?

MANRING: I didn't know going into law school what sort of specialization I might like, so I just did a general orientation. It was a little bit of everything. Also, I will say that one of the things that appealed to me about Tennessee was the fact that it was on the other side of the country. To get there would involve driving back and forth - i.e., a chance to see more of the United States that I wasn't familiar with and also visit with distant relatives along the way. In places such as Ohio and Missouri, there were relatives with whom I could stay, talk to about family history, and they could show me places where my ancestors used to live, that sort of thing.

Q: What, okay. Now while you were at the University of Tennessee, you're in a very different kind of location, very different environment. How did that strike you?

MANRING: I remember sitting in class on the first day of law school and listening to my fellow students, about 85% of whom were from Tennessee. Wow! To me, they had the most melodious accents – a real variety depending on where they were from in Tennessee. I think we had a couple of people from Alabama as well. To me that was just like music, hearing these people asking questions. Another thing that I didn't realize, again, having spent so much time on the west coast was how entrenched segregation was and how defined race relations were in the south. I came face-to-face with that in Tennessee. Much to my surprise, the University of Tennessee Law School was operating under a federal court desegregation order. I didn't realize that until after I had been there some time. That was interesting to experience; I thought the desegregation process in public universities had long since been completed, but clearly that was not the case. I saw the same thing in housing. Private landlords routinely wanted to meet you early on in the rental application process to see if you were the "right" race for their neighborhood.

Q: Was there much diversity then or at University of Tennessee are still pretty much majority white?

MANRING: Definitely majority white and majority male. I think at that time to the leadership of the University of Tennessee College of Law, diversity meant admitting as students or hiring as faculty, white women and not much more than that.

Q: Okay. By the time you complete law school, are you thinking then of a particular branch of the law?

MANRING: I was aiming to go back to eastern Washington state, where I'd been living before law school, and practice general law in a rural area. Near Washington State University. That really appealed to me at that time.

Q: Okay. Then, and the other thing is, during this period, have you met your future wife or was that to come later?

MANRING: That was later.

Q: Okay. Okay. Um, so did you go back to Washington to practice law?

MANRING: I did. I went back to Washington state in December of 1979, took the bar exam in early 1980. In May, 1980, I was notified that I had passed the bar exam. It was right about the same time as Mt. St. Helens exploded (May 18, 1980).

Q: Okay.

MANRING: I went into practice with another young lawyer in the small town, Garfield, Washington, my parents' hometown, near the ghost town where I had been living before I

went to law school. It was a general law practice: a little criminal law, income taxes, divorces, writing wills, doing real estate transactions - anything that came in the door. It was largely fun; I enjoyed the diversity in the work.

Q: Is there one case that stands out in your mind?

MANRING: Law is usually pretty serious, but every now and then a bit of humor creeps in. Because I lived in the same county as Washington State University, there were a lot of driving while under the influence of alcohol cases because of the students. Early in my practice, I was on the roster of attorneys whom those arrested for driving while under the influence of alcohol could call from the county jail in Colfax for after-hours advice before blowing into the sheriff's breathalyzer machine to have breath alcohol content measured. Often, the arrested person was young, male, and hoping for an easy way out of the situation - either no conviction on his record or no loss of his driver's license - and perhaps most importantly, the parents not finding out about it. I remember one call in particular on a weekend between midnight and 1am. It was a young man who sounded desperate, and clearly under the influence. After he told me what he could remember about what and how much he had had to drink that night, I ran through my list of options he had at that point, e.g., to blow into the breathalyzer machine and face a likely conviction or not to blow and have his driver's license suspended. At the end of each option, he would say loudly, "I can't do that!" I repeated the options so he could - perhaps - think about them. No change. He kept saying, "I can't do that!" In exasperation, I finally told him his only other option was to move to Canada and change his name. His response was a very loud, "what!" and I think he hung up the phone. About two minutes later, my phone rang again and it was the arresting Deputy Sheriff, who asked, "Did you just advise so-and-so to change his name and move to Canada?" Of course, I couldn't tell the Deputy what advice I had given the young man - seriously or in jest, so I just told him I ran through the options the arrested fellow had and that as the Deputy was seeing, he was having a difficult time deciding what to do. I never heard what became of the young man. Perhaps he will read this oral history from some place of residence in Canada.

Q: Okay. That's fine. So now as this is 1979, you begin, well 1980, you began your practice. When does the interest in the foreign service begin to surface?

MANRING: So let's see. In 1982, I married my first wife, who had one son whom I adopted. Then we had a daughter in September 1984; we were getting more and more involved in the community. As the children grew and began school in the local public school, it became clear to both of us that they were not going to get exposed to much beyond what's was going on locally and regionally. Not even the whole state of Washington, but just eastern Washington. That's a pretty isolated exposure. At that point, my wife and I started talking about, well, what are some of the options that we can be doing to put ourselves in a position of having our kids in a more interesting and stimulating environment. I've always been interested in foreign languages and I missed not being able to use the French that I knew, for example. So there are a number of factors that came together to reignite an interest in foreign service or some kind of a job

that would give us an opportunity to be overseas, whether it was me as the wage-earner or my wife teaching at an overseas school.

Q: Then what, so then what did you do about it?

MANRING: So, I researched the Foreign Service: how did you get into it? I signed up to take the Foreign Service exam, just figuring well, we'll see, you know, see how I do. My wife was looking into vacancies at overseas schools. At that time, my brother and his wife were teaching at the American School in Casablanca, Morocco, so they were good resources for us. I remember responding to a newspaper ad for U.S. government jobs overseas. As my response, I received a huge amount of paper application material in the mail. Reading through the pages and pages of application material, it became clear to me that it was for the CIA. I immediately burned the application material and never replied, except to say I was no longer interested. The CIA was not anything I wanted to be a part of.

Q: Now up to this point, has your wife been working as well?

MANRING: Mostly not. She did some substitute teaching and was working on her master's degree in teaching.

Q: Okay. No, I just wondered because sometimes when you're applying for the Foreign Service and both spouses are working, you have to take the considerations about being attentive to both careers.

MANRING: No, that wasn't an issue. And, being a substitute teacher is one of those relatively portable skills that one can take along.

Q: Sure. So you take the Foreign Service exam the first time. Do you pass?

MANRING: I do.

Q: Okay, great. As you pass the written and was the oral exam which followed for you in any way difficult or did you feel confident going in?

MANRING: I wouldn't say that I felt confident going in. I mean I felt pretty comfortable with my law background, being able to do extemporaneous speaking, organizing my thoughts well, being able to use sentences that are grammatically correct. I felt I was on pretty solid ground in that way. However, I didn't know exactly what the oral exam was going to be. Eventually, I passed the oral exam and was ready for the next step.

Q: Once you're on the list, was it in a particular cone?

MANRING: No, when I came in we were un-coned (meaning no particular specialization).

Q: Oh, okay. Um, and what year was that?

MANRING: So that would have been in January 1994.

Q: Okay. So you practiced law for about thirteen years and then, you know, made major agreement with your partner and, you get the call and you and family go to Washington, DC?

MANRING: Essentially that's what happened. I was offered a place in the January, 1994 A-100 class. It was the 70th A-100 class, and of course it was right in the middle of the school year. So that wasn't the optimal situation for our two kids who were in school then. Also, by that time we'd had two more kids, so we were a family with four kids.

Q: But it was one of those situations where, if you don't accept it when they make the offer, that may be it.

MANRING: We decided I should go ahead and accept that I would go to Washington and then the family would catch up maybe during the spring, at spring break.

Q: Um, and so you said 1994, but was it 1984?

MANRING: No, no, it's 1994. I've been practicing law for about 12 years.

Q: Okay. My apologies. I misunderstood that. The time frame. Okay. So, um, yeah, that's a solid, that's a solid career. 12 years.

Q: All right. Now you get to Washington and how do you feel about the A-100 course in 1994? Um, was it helpful for you as you look back in preparing you for the foreign service, either, you know, from the point of view of working in embassy or simply better understanding the corporate culture of the Foreign Service?

MANRING: Certainly. My class was the first class to start the A-100 course at the brand new FSI (NFATC) facility in Arlington, Virginia. In fact, all the material that the class organizers sent to us in advance was still all about how to get to and from the former Rosslyn facility. I thought the class was tremendous. We had a small group. I think we started out with maybe 28 people in the class. So I think that also helped, you know, there's a lot more time for the Q and A and the various presentations. And I've got to say it was a very good introduction to federal service, the foreign service, and the State Department. It was at a general level. It wasn't until you receive your first overseas assignment that you start getting additional training that will focus on what you're going to be doing at your first posting. The A-100 course really gave me a flavor for what, an embassy setting was going to be like, as well as how large a bureaucracy the Department of State was.

Q: Okay. What was your class of 28 life demographically.

MANRING: I think we were about 90% white and probably about 50 - 50 male - female. Everybody had a university degree and many people had a degree beyond an undergraduate degree, whether it was a specialized degree such as law or, you know, a master's in international affairs or something like that.

This is my A-100 class on March 4, 1994, our swearing-in day. Nick is the one standing in a white jacket with a bow tie.

Q: Were there many people who had had previous international experience experiences as you recall?

MANRING: I would say that there were some who had; it seems like there was somebody who was second-generation Foreign Service. There was somebody else who spent a fair amount of time abroad - his father had been in the military. I would say by and large, however, that not a lot of my A-100 colleagues had significant foreign experience. There were also colleagues who had done either a high school year abroad or university year abroad.

Q: Okay. Now among the choices you had as your first assignment, what, what was your, what were your top choices and did you get one of them?

MANRING: Because I came in with French - I think I tested it at a two-plus/two-plus proficiency level (out of a possible five/five), something like that - I was aiming to go someplace where I could use French and where it'd be a healthy place for the family to live and have good schools. So of course, I was assigned to Mexico City (!) and about six months of Spanish language training, which is not what I was hoping for, but you know, I completely understand the needs of the service. And Latin America was definitely it.

Q: So the six months allowed your family allowed your kids to finish their school year and join you in the summer.

MANRING: Yes. So they came to Washington, DC during spring break I think, and were there, into the summer and then went back to Washington state for the rest of the summer, while I was finishing up whatever additional training I had at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI).

Q: And so you finish your language training and when do you go out to post?

MANRING: Yes, I went to Mexico City in August 1994. I'm guessing it was mid- to late-August. My training was supposed to have been longer, but there was an urgent need for visa officers in Mexico City. So there were a number of us who were scheduled to go to Mexico City and who were pulled out of a training early to get us to post sooner.

Q: Even though you left early, were you able to get a three/three proficiency level?

MANRING: You know, honestly, I don't remember at this point. My guess is probably not. I know that I took language training at post, so my guess is that I did not get to a three/three level at FSI before I went to Mexico City. I am just remembering: I did not get to three/three when I left Washington, DC, but, probably within six months I was up to that level in Mexico.

Q: Okay. Okay. We're recording. Today is April 25th we're resuming our interview with Nick Manring, uh, just before he enters the Foreign Service. Well, great.

MANRING: Thanks very much. I want to mention a few things about where I was in life before coming into the Foreign Service and also give some more detail about what steered me in that direction. As I think I mentioned last time that I had been practicing law in a small, a two-person law firm in Garfield, Washington, a small farming community in eastern Washington state. My practice was primarily a general practice, a traditional small town general practice. You take anything that comes in the door although more on the civil side than on the criminal side. I did, however, seem to specialize in municipal law, I represented a number of towns and taxing districts in that area and that seemed to be taking up more and more of my practice, which was fairly enjoyable. And then in sort of leading up to when I came into the Foreign Service in 1994, I had mentioned that as a child, my dad had a tour overseas. That was my first taste of being abroad, living abroad, learning foreign language. After I graduated from law school and started practicing law, was married and started raising a family, my wife and I both began to realize that for our kids there should be something more than that was on offer in rural America at that time. For example, the local high school had for one year a Fulbright Teacher Exchange - a teacher from Belgium, whom we got to know fairly well. That must've been around 1990 or 1991. That again sort of made us start thinking about overseas experiences. In 1990 or 1991, we took a family vacation to Europe that included visiting friends in France and Belgium, and relatives in the UK. The whole family went and it was pretty impressive to see how the kids were just like sponges soaking up so

much of what we were experiencing overseas. It was very different from what they were used to at home. And about that time, both my wife and I started looking for jobs overseas in the early nineties. My brother (I have one brother) and his wife were both teachers at the American School in Casablanca, Morocco and they were encouraging us to look at teaching possibilities. My wife had teaching credentials so she started looking into applying for overseas teaching positions. I took the Foreign Service exam. Then she became pregnant, it turned out with twins, and that kind of put the kibosh on her pursuing a teaching career right at the moment. Then I passed the Foreign Service exam and made it to the entry point. So that's the direction that we both decided we would go. That brings me up to entering the Foreign Service in early January, 1994. So back to you.

Q: Okay. So at this point when you enter the Foreign Service, you have four children, two infants, two youngsters.

MANRING: Yes, exactly.

Q: As you arrive and get settled, your plan for the moment is that your wife isn't going to work, that, you know, you'll, you will be the principal working spouse. Exactly. Okay. Well how did A-100 go, what did you think?

MANRING: Well, you know, it was a pretty big change. I came in at a time when the A-100 classes were quite small. I think there were 28 was starting out in my A-100 class. I may have mentioned before, it was the first A-100 class to start out at the new FSI/NFATC facility in Arlington. I thought A-100 was pretty impressive: lot of information about working for the federal government writ large, working for the State Department, and specifically trying to give us some ideas as to what might be coming career wise and the first few assignments. I was very impressed with it, I have to say.

Q: Can you recall anything about your class demographics or yeah, anything that stood out to you?

MANRING: I don't remember exactly what the male - female ratio was. It might've been close to 50 - 50. I'm just guessing. Probably something about like that. I think, if I recall correctly, everybody except one woman was white. I don't believe that there were any recent immigrants or recently-naturalized U.S. citizens. Age wise, it was a real mixture. There were people coming in in their mid-fifties all the way down to I think about age 22, and a variety of backgrounds. Very few people had worked for the federal government before. Some people coming out of academia, some people coming out of law practices. So it was work background wise in terms of age and non-federal government, I thought, a good mixture.

Q: Was it a very strong bonding experience for you? Did you stay in touch with A-100 classmates?

MANRING: That's a great question. Certainly we had formed a very tight sort of community. My first assignment was Mexico City. I had one other colleague from A-100

in Mexico City. I had two in Monterrey and one in Tijuana. We had a pretty large subgroup of our A-100 class in Mexico and I think we had somebody in Guatemala as well, and I stayed at particularly close touch with all of them.

Q: At the time of A-100, did anybody impress you as someone who was going to become an ambassador?

MANRING: You know, honestly, no. I mean everybody seemed to be pretty sharp and you could easily see any number of people in the class rising to that level. But no, there wasn't anybody that I would point to and say, okay, that person I bet in 20 years or 25 years is going to be ambassador so-and-so. No, nothing that clear.

Q: Okay. One of the things they, A-100 typically does is an offsite, um, kind of practicum. Did they conduct one of those with you?

MANRING: Yes, they sure did. We went someplace in West Virginia. I think it might've been in or on the outskirts of Harper's Ferry. I don't remember now if it was two days or three days.

Q: Was it the visit the VIP, how, how to handle the visit of the VIP or what, do you recall what the specific activity was?

MANRING: You know, I don't recall what the specific activity was. I remember that there was one of the class mentors there designated as the ambassador for something, but I just can't remember what the scenario was. It was some negotiation ceremony process. I don't think it was a VIP visit, but I may be off on that.

Q: Okay, then in terms of your bidding on the assignment that eventually was Mexico City, was that your top choice or among your top choices?

MANRING: Not really. I came in with a two-plus/ two-plus French, so I was looking for someplace where I could go and use French and someplace that would be a healthy situation for the family as well. I have to say in retrospect, I think Mexico City was a great first assignment. So I have no complaints. It allowed me to learn Spanish and not being acquainted with our southern neighbor, it was a terrific introduction to Mexico and Latin America writ large.

Q: You're training in Spanish. Did it get you all the way to three, three? Did it get you off probation?

MANRING: I didn't at FSI and the reason I didn't is because in mid-August of 1994, the visa demand in Mexico City was so high and they had so many staffing gaps that they basically just vacuumed out the Spanish language training program at FSI of the trainees and said, sorry, anybody who is assigned to a Mexican post, we need to have you go there asap. So I think I was at a two-plus/ two-plus proficiency level when I left FSI without completing my full training assignment.

Q: By the end of Mexico City though, were you able to reach your three/three proficiency level?

MANRING: Sure. I was diligent at taking Spanish at the Embassy. They had a pretty good Spanish language program there. My supervisors were terrific at allowing me time to leave the workplace or leave my desk and go take Spanish. I guess they realized how important that is for getting an entry-level officer off probation, but also generally for a Foreign Service career. So that turned out pretty well.

Q: Okay. Now you, so you reach Mexico City in the fall of 1994.

MANRING: Yeah, I think it was August.

Q: And immediately you were on the non-immigrant visa adjudication line?

MANRING: Absolutely.

Q: Well, as a former attorney, what was your impression?

MANRING: You know, of course, first it's a little overwhelming the number of people that they have going through the visa processing. It was a whole operation from pre-screening to interviewing to name-checking, to printing visas, to giving passports back to people. It was like a factory and it was just really amazing to see that and see how relatively well it was running. I wouldn't say that it was the perfect assembly line process, but considering everything involved such as rotation of American officers in and out of the unit, I thought it was great. And then of course at first it was a little intimidating trying to use Spanish in visa interviews. I thought: Here I am. I did not know Spanish before going to FSI and I am trying to have a decent level of conversation with each and every visa applicant who comes to my window for an interview. I realize that they're the experts in the language and I'm the neophyte. But, it didn't take long before I focused on the phraseology that I needed to get the answers that I needed to be able to make a visa decision. My colleagues were very helpful - sort of steering me and other newcomers on to how to really focus in on key questions to get key information from applicants.

Q: Do you recall, from that time roughly how many total applicants you saw and how many you actually processed that, those sort of basic figures?

MANRING: You know, I don't recall specific numbers. For some reason though, the number over a thousand applicants a day on average comes to mind, but I honestly don't know if that's in any way, shape or form accurate. There were eight of us entry-level officers in the non-immigrant visa (NIV) unit at the time, plus a deputy or two and the section or the unit chief. I'm just thinking that there were eight of us and probably six or seven of us interviewing at any given time. That's just a rough idea of the staffing on the U.S. side.

Q: Now, were there any understandings that you were, you were expected to turn down a certain percentage?

MANRING: No. There wasn't any expectation of how many had to be approved or percentage wise or numbers or how many had to be denied. I think it was pretty clear just by seeing what other officers were doing, what the averages were, percentages for approval and denial. So I that was good guidance for me.

Q: As you were interviewing and becoming more comfortable and I'm confident with being able to get the information you were interested in, did you begin to see trends that were of interest to say the political section or the economic section, demographic or social trends?

MANRING: Not really, at least not as a general rule. However, shortly after I arrived the peso was devalued significantly and there was some concern that that would lead to a sharp increase in visa applicants. That is visa applicants who were really trying to exit Mexico and head north to find work with better pay in the United States. I don't think that we saw that - of course I'm just going by my memory right here. My hunch was that if the peso's devaluation did result in more flow of people to the States, it probably would have been just more people going up to the border and going across that way rather than going through the process of applying for a visa. During that particular time, we were in pretty close contact with both the Political and Economic Sections to keep them informed as to what we were seeing in the visa interviews.

Q: Did you, did your section get back the blue sheets or the notifications when your non-immigrant visa applicants turned out to be intending immigrants and overstayed in the U.S.?

MANRING: We did. It was a slow process, just at the very beginning of computer usage. So it wasn't anything like an email or automatic online system where you could go to find the turnarounds from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) at the border and ports of entry (airports). Now it's Department of Homeland Security. But we did get the blue sheets back from INS and the ports of entry, but sometimes it would be three to six months after the visa interview. So, of course, it's pretty rare after that length of time that you can remember who the actual applicant was and what s/he may have said in the visa interview, but at least it gave us some somewhat delayed feedback as to what were some things that were triggering someone being turned around when they went into the U.S.

Q: Now were you eventually moved to other parts of the consular section?

MANRING: I was, let's see, I started in non-immigrant visas as I've said. Then, since I had an interest in the management cone, I had an opportunity to do a four-month rotation in the Management Section (then called Administration Section). That was divided into two months in General Services Office (GSO), the housing unit; and then two months and the Human Resources Unit. Both of those were great fun, very busy, but very

different from visa work. And it gave me a chance to see another part of the Embassy in operation. Then, let's see, after that I rotated to the American Citizens Services Unit of the Consular Section where I was designated the "deaths officer" - working primarily deaths and estates. That was also a different physical part of the Embassy from the visa unit. I thought it was also very interesting to see. The focus of the unit was on Americans who are visiting the country in particular, the part of the country that was Mexico City's consular district. I found it absolutely fascinating to see how many Americans there were from very young to very old and the types of problems that they encountered when they were in a foreign country, whether it was a sudden death or a serious accident or you know whatever. It taught me a lot about customer service and customer expectations, and dealing with host-country institutions such as police and morgues which were generally below U.S. standards.

In December, 1994, during my tour in Mexico City, I helped out with Vice President Al Gore's visit to attend the swearing-in of Mexico's President Ernesto Zedillo. This is Vice President Gore thanking me.

MANRING: I was in Mexico City for three years and my last year was in the Environment, Science, and Technology (EST) Section. There, I had a portfolio that dealt with monitoring Mexico's natural disaster response systems, cooperative energy projects with the U.S. Department of Energy, and monitoring urban air pollution in Mexico City.

The U.S. Department of Energy worked with the Mexican national oil corporation, PEMEX, on measuring air pollution in Mexico City, and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) worked with CENAPRED (Mexico's National Center for Prevention of Disasters; Centro Nacional de Prevención de Desastres) on volcano and earthquake warning systems. It was a good assignment and pretty interesting.

MANRING: My role was not as a scientist in any way, but to facilitate things to make sure that when the U.S. scientists wanted to bring equipment in that they knew exactly what forms needed to be presented where in order to receive Mexican government permission to have scientific equipment come in - and out - of the country. The USGS was bringing in equipment which had been used to monitor the volcano Mt. St. Helens – the 1980 eruption of which of course I had experienced as a resident of Washington state - to loan or give to the Mexican government. They had to train Mexicans on how to set up and use the equipment on some of the more active volcanoes. Embassy Mexico City had a broad sweep of U.S. government-to-foreign government activities and for that reason, it was a tremendous introduction to another aspect of Foreign Service work.

Q: Now, it's not typical for a first for junior officer routinely to end up staying three years. How did that happen?

MANRING: That was kind of a quirk. When I was offered the position coming into the Foreign Service, I was told it was going to be a three year assignment. I was interested in that because my oldest son had three more years of high school after his current (1993-1994) school year. I didn't want to be in a situation of taking him to post and then moving two years later - just before his senior year of high school. So the State Department recruiter assured me that would be no problem. It wasn't until literally the first day of my A-100 class that I heard that all first assignments were for two years. I went and discussed it with the head of the Assignments Division for entry-level officers. He was helpful enough to be able to figure out a place where a three-year assignment would be possible - and that was Mexico City. Turns out my, my son didn't ever come for school, so it became a moot point. But in any event, that's how it ended up that way.

Q: So your eldest, your eldest son went to a boarding school?

MANRING: No, sometime into my first year in the Foreign Service, my wife at that time decided that this was really not her cup of tea, so she decided to just to pack it up and head back to Washington state with the with the kids. So there I was in a three-year assignment by myself. These things happen.

Q: Okay. But now to go back to the EST Section. You were in an office with one other Foreign Service officer, a supervisor. How did that work?

MANRING: Let's see. There were five officers in the office, and then the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at that time had an EPA attaché who was also part of the office. I think there were maybe three or four local staff as well. So, I don't know what that adds up to - somewhere between six and 10 people. A lot of the local

staffs' focus was on permit processing: archeological permits and certain types of fishing permits. They were the conduit for those U.S. vessels and archeologists coming into Mexico and Mexican waters and monitoring them in through the Mexican bureaucracy, and then getting the permits back to the right entities in the States. That was a part of what they did.

Q: Were there, aside from the sort of support role that you played for visitors, did you have a specific beat that took you out of the Embassy for reporting?

MANRING: Certainly. While I was one of the science officers, anything to do with earthquake monitoring or volcano monitoring gave me opportunities to go out of the office, to go visit Mexican counterparts, and sometimes to go visit an actual off-site someplace and to reporting back to Washington. I know I wrote a cable on some water pollution issues around Tijuana. The U.S. Consulate in Tijuana didn't have a science officer at that time, so I remember going up there for a few days to do some research and interviewing. I also remember also doing a report on, I think it was, sea mammals in a Sea of Cortez. And there were opportunities where the office director or somebody from Washington wanted to know specific information about a particular issue and I was one of the people who might get sent out to research and write it up.

Q: Were there any major environmental crises that you worked on while you were there?

MANRING: Not that I can recall. Volcanoes, earthquakes, and urban air pollution were standing issues of interest to various USG offices in Washington, DC. There's a large volcano just outside of Mexico City, the short name is Poco, the long name is Popocatepetl. It started being active towards the end of my tour, so there was a lot of interest in Washington about that. Whenever it erupts, it puts enough ash into the air that it disrupts commercial air traffic in and out of Mexico City. So there was interest in Washington - from the FAA for example, in finding out more about how the Mexican government was handling that, what they perceived, what their plans were for diverting air traffic if this were to be a long term occurrence, etc. Also, air pollution in Mexico City. By the time I was there in '94 to '97, it was not as bad as it had been earlier because by 1994 cars had been switched off of leaded gas and to unleaded gas; lead had been the largest major contaminant in the air. But there was still a lot of particulate matter in the air from the dryness of the climate and from time to time there would be particularly high levels of ozone in the air. There was always an interest in this not only in Washington, but also the Embassy community, and schools where Embassy kids were going.

Q: Did we, were we working with the Mexicans on any international environmental issues at the time?

MANRING: So nothing that was in my portfolio, but I know one of my colleagues, Bill Gibbons-Fly, for example, worked on turtle excluder devices in fishing nets. I know that was not just with Mexico, that was a regional issue. I don't remember if that was on the Caribbean side or the Pacific side of Mexico or both. I know that was an example of something that was multilateral.

Q: And this is the last question about it. There were many bilateral commissions between the U.S. and Mexico, some established by now after, but some are just, were there for many, many years. Were there any that you took part in with regard to your EST or Human Resources assignments?

MANRING: I'm trying to remember. I, I know that I was involved in the support for number of Washington visitors: Vice President Gore in December of '94 for the Mexican presidential inauguration; President Clinton, I think in '97; Secretary of State Albright also in '97, I don't remember any particular science-related binational commissions that I was involved in.

Q: Okay. Then as you approached the end of this tour, um, what are your thoughts about where you want to go next?

MANRING: I was interested in going to Europe. I thought that that would be, again, a good place for possible schooling for my kids, a good healthy environment. And, I'm still trying to find a way to use French. I did some research and I found that the largest number of language-designated positions in for entry-level Foreign Service officers in Europe was for German language positions. I guess that was because in Germany we had a number of consulates and this was before the visa waiver program came in. (Meaning that at that time, travelers to the U.S. still needed visas.) So we were doing visa work in Germany plus Austria and Switzerland. Besides bidding on places in Europe where French was the language, to boost my chances of being assigned to a German-language position as well, I started taking German classes at the Goethe Institute in Mexico City on Saturday mornings. This was to boost my German language proficiency level, which was pretty low from only high school German, up to something that would catch somebody's attention if I were bidding.

I have to say it was a pretty interesting experience. I was in a class where the instructor was Austrian, who unlike most Germans who are fluent in English as well as number of other languages, was fluent in Spanish and German, but did not know English. So every time I asked a grammatical question, she would explain the German grammar to me in Spanish. It was just a real challenge to be able to try to figure out German grammar through this lens of Spanish. Anyway, I improved my German proficiency up to, I don't know, perhaps a two/two level. That made me look pretty competitive for bidding. I bid and was assigned to the U.S. Consulate in Frankfurt as my next assignment. This was also a consular assignment.

Q: Were you looking for consular work or were you more looking for the location?

MANRING: I was looking for the location, although I knew by that time that I wanted to be management-coned. Remember I came in un-coned so I was trying to steer myself towards a management assignment. In comparison to consular assignments for entry-level officers, those are pretty few and far between, so I went with another consular assignment, again, based largely on the location.

Q: So now was this an assignment that um, the rest of your family welcomed as well?

MANRING: I think so. I think that although it's further away from home base, compared to Mexico City, it's certainly an environment that's more familiar.

Q: So now you go to Germany, but do you get a little bit more German training before?

MANRING: Sure. I did. I think I was given 10 weeks of German language training at FSI during the summer of 1997.

Q: And then your family joins you, although I imagine your eldest son is now going to college.

MANRING: That's right. He's going to college. By that time, I was divorced. My daughter (we have one daughter) did join me for the first semester in Frankfurt. She went to the Frankfurt International School. It's a pretty good school. But then she figured she really liked it in Washington state better than in Germany. So after one semester she went back to her mom's and in rural, eastern Washington.

Q: Okay. Now when you arrived in Frankfurt and I, I guess you by then had three/three German with, with the additional training, um, what are your responsibilities in the consular section?

MANRING: So Frankfurt has a big consular section and like in Mexico City, it has lots of different components. I fell right into the non-immigrant visa unit again. It was really interesting because it was a very different type of visa applicant. In Frankfurt, many visa applicants go there because of the Frankfurt airport. So for example, I had a lot of Iranians because at that time, we had no embassy in Tehran. It was relatively easy for a number of them to fly to Germany, to conduct business, visit relatives, go to the Consulate, apply for a visa, etc. There was a real wide range of nationalities of visa applicants.

That was also a pretty interesting to experience. In Mexico, the non-Mexican applicants would be, you know, 1% of the applicants or 2% or at least a very low percentage. In Germany, it was just the opposite. So I landed in the non-immigrant visa unit (NIV) and I stayed there most of the time I was in Frankfurt. It was a two-year assignment. I ended up only being there for one year and I'll get to that in just a minute. I think I did NIVs for maybe two-thirds of that time. The last third of the time, I was in the immigrant visa (IV) unit as part of a rotation, followed by a few weeks in the passport unit. I did not have immigrant visa experience before, so I enjoyed that. The largest part of our clientele were American military who had been on assignment in Europe, had met someone, fallen in love, gotten married, and now wanted to take a new spouse with - usually - him back to the States, and needed an immigrant visa for the spouse.

I will say that one of our immigrant visa applicants was Heidi Klum. I, as a naive mid 40-year-old, had no idea who she was as we were processing the visa, but my staff made

absolutely certain that I knew who she was by the time I had to do the visa interview. Always learning. By this time, I was management-coned. There was a vacancy in a management/consular/security position at our consulate in Hamburg, a very small consulate in northern Germany. The Embassy was scouting around for an easier way to fill this position rather than going back through Washington with a more cumbersome job announcement and bidding process. Because I knew German, was management-coned, and I had consular experience in Germany, whoever was making the decision decided, "Hey, Nick would be good for this if he's interested."

So they offered the job to me. That was also a two-year assignment. To me it meant leaving Frankfurt in the summer of 1998 and moving up to Hamburg, which I did.

Q: Go ahead and describe the, the responsibilities of the Hamburg work.

MANRING: Before doing that, let me just mention something else about the Frankfurt job, which for officers was a good work experience. Frankfurt was the home base of one regional consular officer who was a more senior consular officer and who had responsibility to oversee consular work in primarily far eastern Europe and the central Asian newly independent countries. Often, our embassies in those countries would have a single first-tour officer doing consular work and a very small embassy staff without much consular backup or consular supervision. That consular supervision, then, was provided by the regional consular officer out of Frankfurt. At the time I was there, that officer was Michael Kirby, who went on to be our ambassador to first of all Moldova and then to Serbia. As the regional consular officer, he would offer TDYs (temporary assignments) to consular officers in Frankfurt to go out to some of these posts when an officer there needed to go on home leave or for whatever reason. So I ended up in early 1998 spending two weeks in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Again, to me, that was a fascinating experience. Traveling to and working even briefly in a brand new country such as Turkmenistan was one of those things that you could really only dream of. The capital city is just a few miles north of the Iranian border, so you really know that you're out there. But anyway, that was a real plus during my Frankfurt assignment.

Jumping ahead to Hamburg. In Hamburg, the primary part of the portfolio was management and that was supervising local staff and working with the Embassy. At the beginning of my tour there, the Embassy was in Bonn, and had not yet moved to Berlin. I was working with Embassy staff on human resources issues, budget issues, building maintenance issues, etc. That was just the management layer. Then there was the consular layer. Hamburg was a non-visa issuing post, so they only did American citizens services, which was primarily passport issuances. In those days passports were issued at post. We had very few arrest cases and we had a few international parental child abduction cases where I'd go and do visitations with the children and report back to Washington. Also, there was no security officer at post, so that also fell to me. I was not quite at the level of being a regional security officer, (RSO) but I was the Embassy's regional security officer's eyes on the ground. So that was the overall portfolio: management, consular, and security. When I went there, the consular district was the northern part of Germany except for the north eastern state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which had been in

former East Germany and was in Berlin's consular district. Because of the way the roads were, I think they figured out it would make more sense for that area to be covered by Hamburg. So shortly after I arrived that was added to our consular district. That's kind of an overview of what I was doing there.

Q: Did your job require you to travel throughout the consular district?

MANRING: Yes, whether it was prison visits or visits to children who had been abducted by one parent. In addition, sometimes the consul general would receive a lot of invitations to attend a lot of events and would sort of pass those out among other officers if anybody wanted to go to Schwerin or Kiel or Bremen for certain events. That was also a pretty good way to get out and see the consular district and at times, practice public speaking.

Q: And as security officer, did you have any significant problems?

MANRING: Well, the building that the Consulate was in and I think may still be in, although I know they're in the process of selling it, was a large 1880s era villa. It was actually two villas which had been combined after the Second World War. Previously to our ownership, it had been used by the Nazi party as a regional party headquarters. The U.S. acquired it at the end of the war. We had no perimeter fence, no significant setback from streets front and back, no bulletproof windows. So yes, there were some real physical security concerns. The start of my tour coincided with the bombings of our Embassy in Nairobi for example, which elevated the concerns about our physical security.

I remember early on working with our local guards on vehicular access to our office compound. We had no Marines and no American guards. It was all contracted local guards. We had a small parking lot on the grounds and I instituted making sure that the local guards were checking every vehicle that came in. I did a lot of liaison with the city of Hamburg police. I know at one point the police closed off the road in front of the Consulate (Alsterufer) to avoid any kind of possibility of a vehicular bomb that might do damage to the consulate staff and building. So to answer your question, I would say security was always a concern given the way the property was (it was squeezed between a small road behind the Consulate and a larger road in front of the Consulate). So we had no setback from, from either street and lots of public access both in front and back.

When the city police closed off the road in front of the Consulate, they built an improvised protection wall along the front side of the Consulate property, using large, metal, empty shipping containers which they borrowed from the Otto Dörner company in Hamburg. Someone in that company came up with a poster to generate some positive publicity for the firm. The poster had a photo of one of their clearly-labeled containers in front of the iconic Consulate building, with the U.S. flag flying on top, with the slogan – in German: “Otto Dörner Protects America.” I love how clever that was!

"Otto Dönner Protects America" publicity poster with the U.S. Consulate Hamburg, 1998 or 1999.

Q: And as the management officer was there talk or suggestion of getting a new building?

MANRING: There wasn't. The building was perhaps about 40% empty. It's higher occupancy times were, I think, during the Cold War because it was relatively close to the East German border. But, we still had a Department of Commerce presence, Department of Agriculture presence, a public diplomacy section, and a small political section. So there were enough users and because we also owned the building, there wasn't any rent that we were paying. That made sense at that point to just stay where we were. On the dollars and cents side, of course that question is always out there: does it make better

economic sense as stewards of U.S. taxpayers' dollars to move or stay put? On the security side, that was also the period where the Embassy was moving or getting ready to move from Bonn to Berlin. Being perfectly frank, Embassy officials were not going to look at any other major kind of building project until they were successfully moved to new quarters in Berlin. That was the focus of the management and security side of the Embassy, 100%.

Q: So you spent a total of two years in Hamburg. Yes. And the fact that most, well, the variety of work you did, all of it having some management element must have been good for your overall evaluation and so on. Were you, were you promoted during that time?

MANRING: I'm trying to remember and I think I was promoted in my first year in Hamburg. It must've been after my first year in Hamburg. My work there must've had some kind of a role in that. Another thing that was somewhat unique to the work there on the management side was the fact that the building was for all intents and purposes an historic building and still had a lot of original stylistic elements. For example, the central stairwell and the balconies outside. That gave me an opportunity to work with management writ large and the Office of Overseas Buildings back in the States. We worked with Hamburg city officials on identifying what these historic architectural elements were and documenting them. Then we'd ensure that people who might be working on plans or projects, whether it was to put in new electrical cables or new telephone cables, were taking these historic architectural factors into account. I'm a real history buff so it was fun to see that process work. This wasn't on an everyday basis, but it was one component of it. Something else that I did while I was in Hamburg was historical research on the Consulate. I had to go back to Washington, DC for the multiple-week-long general services officer course at FSI. It didn't work out to do it between Frankfurt and Hamburg, so I went back to Washington and took it after I had started my tour in Hamburg. While I was in Washington, I went to the National Archives research facility in College Park, Maryland and spent an afternoon or two doing research on old records on the Consulate. I was able to find records going back into the 1790s. Hamburg was an early U.S. consular post. Using that research, I was able not only to write something for the Consulate's records, which I think is currently on their website, but I also provided the consul general with information to make reference to certain historical events in his speeches. Then I did an article for State Magazine, I think it must've been published in 2000, on the early history of the Consulate, including having provided assistance to Lafayette after he had been captured by the Prussians during one of the Napoleonic wars. So that was great fun to do.

Q: Wow. And you know, you did it on your own. No one, no one was asking.

MANRING: That's right. During my assignment in Mexico City, I had also done an article for State Magazine about the U.S. military cemetery in Mexico City. It’s a vestige of the Mexican War of the 1840s and maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission as one of the oldest – and smallest – official U.S. cemeteries abroad. I enjoyed finding a history angle in my postings.

Q: That's certainly 100% on your own. Doesn't show up in your work requirements or anything like that.

MANRING: No – it was not part of my official work duties.

Q: Great. The last question I've got about Hamburg is: 1998 or so was also a time when the State Department was becoming much more wired in terms of intranet, email and so on. Did that pose a challenge for what you were doing as a manager?

MANRING: I wouldn't say that automation posed a challenge, but it was certainly one of those things that we needed to start factoring in as the Embassy was getting funding for things such as computers which were being shipped out either from the Bureau of Consular Affairs or from the European Affairs Bureau in Washington. I think it was about 1999 that we started using, for example, the Internet to push information out if we wanted to reach American citizens in our consular district whom we knew about. That was when we started doing things like that. I've got to say that was also very positive. We no longer had to rely on trying to reach somebody by phone or reach somebody by a letter; if he or she had access to the Internet, that that certainly sped up the process of making those kinds of contacts.

Q: Um, but as yet no cell phones for the Consulate?

MANRING: I honestly don't recall. I remember a consulate duty phone, but I don't remember if I had a work cell phone in addition. I know I had my own cell phone, but I don't believe that I had a work cell phone. It must have been pre-Blackberry device days. At least as far as I recall, Blackberries didn't come along until somewhat after Y2K (2000).

Q: I think that's exactly right. Were there any other kind of unique experiences that you had in Hamburg before we, before we follow you to the next assignment?

MANRING: Certainly Hamburg was my first management assignment - with a large management component that allowed me to work management issues with different sections of the Consulate. For example, working management aspects (space, human resources, IT) with the public diplomacy and political sections. It also gave me a good opportunity to work with different U.S. Government agencies, sort of meshing and seeing what their management support requirements were and then trying to figure out how the State Department could help make their work overseas easier or more manageable. In Hamburg, we had the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Commerce, and that was also when USIS folded into the State Department. So there were a number of different agencies that I was working with on a regular basis and I have to say, I really, I enjoyed that. Of course, each agency has its own way of doing management support, but just trying to figure out how we could work together to get these officers and local staff what they needed was a good challenge and professionally rewarding. In addition, I had the proverbial management officer situation in Hamburg as well: the very demanding boss' wife. She wasn't satisfied with anything: home furniture, representational funds,

you name it, and her husband was completely under her control, so did nothing to rein her in. Our biggest problem in addressing her concerns was that the Embassy management staff was focused more and more on the move from Bonn to Berlin, and had neither funds nor time for issues at a small consulate. In any event, it was good for me to have this baptism by fire relatively early on in my Foreign Service career so as to develop mechanisms and styles to deal with this recurring, classic management officers' challenge.

Q: As the management officer, you were also the head of the housing board?

MANRING: Well, we were so small we didn't have a housing board until, I think my last year to six months at post. Before that housing assignments were done by the Embassy.

Q: With this experience now, what are you, what are you thinking about in terms of where you're going next?

MANRING: I'm interested in management. I'm also interested in Europe. Europe seem to be pretty easy place to live, and also with a complete array of management, security, and consular issues to work on, and by this time, at the end of my tour in Hamburg in May 2000, I married my wonderful current wife. She was German; she had been a local hire at the Consulate in Frankfurt. That's where we met - in the NIV Unit. She joined me for my tour in Hamburg and we married at the end of that tour in May 2000. In terms of a next assignment, being somewhere close to Europe would allow her to be close to for her 80-plus-year-old mother in central Germany and also her support group as it were. So I'm not really sure how the next assignment came about, but the next assignment was to Belfast, Northern Ireland. It was a very similar position at another very small consulate. This time, consular work was the largest part, then management second largest, and then security was the third largest. So I don't remember if it was through the regular bidding process or whether the Belfast position came open and again within the European Affairs Bureau, they were looking for somebody who could do that type of work it. The consul general in Belfast at that time, Jane (Ki) Fort, was very particular and I know she chose me for the assignment after we had a telephone interview. That ended up being my next assignment

Q: Between the assignments you take home leave and so on. But was there any other training that you took between Hamburg and Belfast?

MANRING: I'm just trying to think if I took any specific training then. I don't remember off hand. I don't think I needed any major consular training and I don't think I needed any management training. It could be, however, that I might've taken a week or two-week-long consular course on using computers, which was more and more coming into play. I just don't remember off hand, but it wouldn't surprise me if there was something like that that I would have needed to take. I do remember my consultations in Washington, DC before going to Belfast. Our consulate in Belfast was a one-issue post: the Northern Ireland Peace Process. It was high on the State Department's, Congress', and the White House's foreign policy objectives. The Peace Process was all about the successful

implementation of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which the U.S. had brokered. So my consultations focused on the status of the implementation and also on a new job training visa to help reduce unemployment among youth in Northern Ireland and the border areas of Ireland: the Walsh Visa Program.

Q: All right. Now you arrive in Belfast in 1999.

MANRING: July 2000.

Q: 2000. Okay. So it was right at the end of the negotiations on the Good Friday Agreement?

MANRING: Yes, the Good Friday Agreement went into effect in April of 1998. So this was two years after that and in the implementation process. It was a very slow implementation process and I'll mention some specifics shortly. As to our arrival in Belfast, in Northern Ireland, there's a period of time of about a week between about the 10th, 11th of July and maybe the 18th, 19th of July which is known as the parade season. During that time, either Protestants/unionists or Catholics/nationalists - although it was primarily Protestant/unionists - do massive parades to commemorate events in the 17th century viewed as important to their respective causes. The Protestant/unionist parades often include going through a Catholic/nationalist neighborhood or two and vice-versa. Plus, the parades tend to get violent with serious stone throwing and they were followed by huge bonfires at night. That's traditionally been a time when Protestant/unionists attacked the Catholic neighborhoods for example. To a lesser extent, the reverse is true, but really it was primarily the Protestant/unionist side flexing its muscle.

So we arrive in London to do consultations at the Embassy, to do my check-in at the Embassy before going up to Belfast; Belfast was a constituent post the U.S. Embassy in London. We arrived there I think 10th or the 11th of July and it was chaos in Belfast because of the parades. You could see in the newspapers and on the TV news: cars are burning, large crowds of people throwing stones. So by the end of my couple of days of consultations, the consul general in Belfast, Ki Fort, told us not to come up to Belfast as the road between the airport and the city of Belfast as not safe at that point in time. We were instructed just to hang out in London. My wife and I were in The Millennium Hotel on Grosvenor Square - the same square as the where the Embassy was then located. I think it was the most luxurious hotel we had ever been in. Incidentally, it's the same hotel where former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko was poisoned in 2006.

We had flown to London from home leave in Hawaii, a 12-hour time difference. I remember we were just absolutely, totally exhausted. I struggled to get through my mandatory consultations and then I just crawled back to the hotel, climbed into bed, and fell asleep. In my recollection, I think we ended up staying in London through four extra days until the consul general in Belfast said, okay, it's now normal enough that you can come up and there'll be no security issues getting into Belfast city. So we used the time in London mostly to sleep because of that big time difference and I continued with Embassy consultations to the extent I could. That was our adjustment period. Plus the Wimbledon

tennis tournament was going on and we're both real fans of that. So when we were awake, that's usually what we were watching on TV; for me between additional consultations. That was my introduction to the U.S. Mission to the UK!

Q: Okay. Now, from the consultations that you had either in the U.S. or in London, what were they warning you about in terms of Northern Ireland? Because you know, the media in the U.S. would have portrayed the signing of the Good Friday Agreement as sort of the end of the Troubles and seldom covered anything more about Northern Ireland after that.

MANRING: Certainly, by July 2000 Northern Ireland was a lot less of an international issue, but it was still a very high priority for the Clinton Administration. They really wanted to see the peace process succeed and were very, very committed to it. I think President Clinton had been to Belfast already maybe four or five times as president and he made one more trip in December of 2000 before leaving office as well. This was also at a time when Congress was involved in the peace process. For example, Representative Jim Walsh of New York sponsored legislation for a specific visa program to provide training in the U.S. for younger unemployed people from Northern Ireland and the northern part of the Republic of Ireland. This would give them a chance to receive on-the-job training and a little work experience in the U.S. The intent was that the young people would then bring that training and experience back to the north of Ireland with them, boosting their employability there. The visa program was just getting off the ground with contractors in the U.S. and a part of the Northern Ireland regional government in Belfast. One of my tasks was to make sure that this program kept going, identifying issues that needed to be worked on either on the UK side of things or on the, on the U.S. side. So even though the Good Friday Agreement was starting to go into effect, there was still a lot of work that needed to be done to ensure cross-community economic opportunities, for example. So, my Washington and London consultations included that visa program and also as a secondary issue, looking for a new consulate facility.

The Consulate was on Queen Street in downtown Belfast, opposite a just-closed police station, a Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) police station. At one point in the not-so-distant past, it had had been bombed and the Consulate lost a number of windows for example. Plus, I think we had maybe 15 feet of setback from the street. We were on the second floor of a four-or five-story office building (Queen's House). Very close to the street and nothing more than regular glass in the many windows along the street side of our office. At that time, Northern Ireland was an area where you knew that almost everybody who walked past you on the street knew how to make a bomb and had access to the material to make one if they wanted to. Added to that was the fact that to access the building's parking area, one had to drive directly under the consul general's office. So again, security was a concern. Because of that, trying to find another suitable place for the Consulate was high on the consul general's list of things to do. The building we were in, I think , was built in the 1950s and looked as though little had been updated in it after that, so it was pretty dated as well.

The consul general also had some concerns about the location of her residence (Ardnavalley). She had actually moved out of the residence because it was in the middle of a very strongly Protestant/unionist neighborhood. Although there hadn't been any particular issues, I think her view was that for the long term, it would be better to be located in a more neutral setting that was clearly open to both Protestant and Catholic - unionists and national - members of the community. So those are some of the things that were on my list of consultation topics going into the job.

Q: Was it a three-year posting?

MANRING: Yes. So I started in July of 2000 and left in May of 2003.

Q: You are the management officer.

MANRING: Management/consular/security. The only difference between this and Hamburg was that in Belfast, consular was the larger part of the portfolio, whereas in Hamburg management was the larger part of that portfolio.

Q: Alright. Now as the management officer, did you have Marines or was it a local guard force?

MANRING: In both Hamburg and Belfast we had no Marines and were called "lock-and-leave" posts. That meant the American officers had the responsibility to open and close the office every day. Plus, the guard force was again a local guard force. In Hamburg, it was via contract, and in Belfast, it was direct hire.

Q: So what was the staffing in Belfast?

MANRING: When I went there, there was the consul general, the political officer and me. I was the "everything else officer." The rest were local staff. There were maybe about 10 local staff. About a year into my tour we added a public diplomacy officer. So then there were four of us officers. It was a pretty small operation and really, except for looking for a new office building and looking for a new residence for the consul general, the work was monothematic. The overwhelming focus of every part of the Consulate was on moving, millimeter by millimeter, the peace process forward - that is, the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. There was still a lot of work to do. Extreme unionist politicians such as Ian Paisley, Sr., for example, would not be seen either in public and often not even in private with Sinn Fein nationalist politicians. Imagine trying to hammer out the implementation of a broad agreement such as the Good Friday Agreement when some of the politicians/representatives involved would not even sit down with others. You can see that in how long it took to stand up a new police entity (the Police Services of Northern Ireland) and a supervising board that was supposed to have representatives from all the political parties on it. For me, most of my consular work was either related to the Walsh Visa Program or visas for current or former politicians or community activists who had been on either one side or the other and who had been convicted of or involved in what was called terrorism under U.K. law - some kind of

armed aggression during the Troubles period. Because of that, under the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, they were prevented from getting a U.S. visa without going through a laborious process of vetting and decision-making in Washington with the Departments of Justice and State. Through the end of the Clinton Administration (January 19, 2001), the White House was interested, as were some members of Congress, in trying to "normalize" life in Northern Ireland. To them, normalizing also meant normal travel to the U.S. to give talks, to meet with people to talk about what was going on in Northern Ireland, to be exposed first-hand to our democracy, etc. The White House - specifically the National Security Council - followed these visas and helped broker agreements on specific cases between the Departments of Justice and State. That was of course before everything was computerized, so I can remember these five- or six-page long cables that we would have to transmit requesting permission to issue visas in these cases.

Q: We're going to pick up now in Belfast with a few more parts of that tour.

MANRING: We were talking about my tour in Belfast, Northern Ireland, July of 2000 to May of 2003, and in many ways it was a unique assignment. For one thing, it was high profile, seeing the Peace Process through was a high objective of the Clinton administration, which was in office until January of 2001. Then in addition to that, there was a lot of Congressional interest in the Northern Ireland Peace Process. So, there was a great deal of Washington attention; it was a small post— there were three officers when I went—and it expanded up to four while I was there, but the sole issue was moving the Northern Ireland Peace Process forward. The Good Friday Agreement had been signed in April of 1998, and after that it was all about the implementation and preventing any backsliding. That was really interesting for me because all my consular work, much of my management work, and a lot of my security work was supporting that one objective.

There were some unique aspects about it as well. One is our consulate in Belfast was the primary place for the execution of the Walsh Visa Program. That was a Congressionally-crafted special visa which provided work experience in the U.S. for largely unemployed youth from Northern Ireland and some of the border counties in the Republic of Ireland. The aim, again, was supporting the Peace Process by trying to reduce unemployment, increase the skills in some of the younger, working population there. It was a very problematic visa program. I think it maybe lasted about five or six years. I came in at either the first or the second year. So, a lot of the implementation was still in the works from the Northern Ireland side and from the U.S. side. It was difficult for a number of reasons. For example, the recipients of the visas tended to be youth, maybe average age 20 to 25. They generally had no higher education; very little if any work experience; and no kind of work ethic where they knew to get up in the morning, get to a particular job site on time, be there the whole day, not having three beers during lunch, etc. So, there were problems with the work ethic of the visa recipients, drinking mostly after hours, the recipients going AWOL [absent without leave]. They would just sort of disappear for a week or two. And those were really interesting things to try to work through, again, with the goal being helping to support the Peace Process in Northern Ireland.

Another aspect that was of interest was the Visas Viper program. That was kind of a dormant program that the State Department had to solicit information through the interagency and from local law enforcement agencies around the world to feed into our visa system to prevent people who were suspected of or convicted of terrorist acts from getting a visa and coming into the U.S. In Northern Ireland, there were literally thousands of people who had received terrorist convictions during the civil war/Troubles period from the 1970s to the 1990s. These people were not eligible for visas, and post—that is the consulate in Belfast—did a lot of work on getting names, birth dates, criminal histories, that sort of thing of the people who had these kinds of convictions. Now, these are not people who were generally interested in anything against the U.S. Their terrorism acts were really part of the civil war process that had been going on in Northern Ireland. But nonetheless, because of their, generally convictions, sometimes arrest, they just weren't eligible for a U.S. visa without the extra steps that needed to be taken. For example, an actual visa interview. So, in the early 2000s, we were generating visas viper cables, first a couple of times a week, and then it worked out to being almost one a day. Each cable was a report on one person, detailing his/her alleged connection to terrorism – e.g., a specific conviction. There were so many people there who'd been convicted. Then in the U.S., 9/11 happened in 2001 and terrorism rose significantly on the radar screen of the U.S. government. The State Department and the White House became much more interested in the Visas Viper Program, which, as I said, had been kind of a sleeper around the world, except in Belfast. The State Department then reached out to us to see exactly what our program was, how we were able to get information, how we were able to process so many cables, etc. We had a template developed, for example, that was pretty easy for us to use. The Bureau of Consular Affairs had the State Department use our template to start to beef up the Visas Viper Program around the world. They also used our written operating procedures to send to other posts and get to other consular officers.

On the management side, supporting progress on implementing the Peace Process meant ensuring the Consul General's home was always in tip-top shape so it would be a convenient venue for dinners, teas, and meetings with political leaders from all sides. The same for the Consulate. Helping with the logistics of meetings as well. I remember one series of meetings in the Consul General's office where there was for some reason an unusually short time window. The meetings were such that politicians often did not want to run into or in any way be seen with politicians from opposing political parties. We had to manage the logistics such that one group was leaving through the back parking lot of the office building just as the other entourage was entering through the front door. It was terrific diplomatic experience to be part of that kind of an operation, an operation that yielded respected and positive results.

Security, I thought, was always an issue in Northern Ireland. This was an area, remember, where small bomb making and small bomb use was very common. I always figured that almost anybody on the street had access to bomb making materials and the knowledge as to how to put them together. Years earlier, the windows of the consulate had been blown out, not as an attack on the consulate, but we just happened to be across the street from a police station that was the object of a bomb attack. So for me, that was always something that I had in the back of my mind, making sure that our staff knew

where to go in an emergency, how to do duck-and-cover drills, etc. We were in perhaps a 1950s office building downtown with about 10 to 15 feet of setback. Clearly, non-compliant with then-current State Department physical security requirements. So, one of the things that I worked on with the Embassy in London and the OBO [Overseas Building Operations] office back in Washington was trying to locate a new consulate building that would meet physical security standards. The consul general also felt that a newer, less-shabby-looking consulate would demonstrate the United States' strong commitment to Northern Ireland politically. A new building was found towards the end of my tour, and in fact my tour ended with remodeling going on at the soon to be new consulate office building on Stranmillis Road. It was a beautiful, late 1880s mansion with good setback that the U.S. was allowed to significantly clean up and add physical security enhancements (but leaving the salient architectural features both inside and out). I left Belfast before the actual move in. The consulate is currently there, so, it seems like it worked out well.

Also on the consular side, as I already mentioned, because of the number of convictions that many politicians on either side of the divide had, if they wanted to go to the U.S. for speeches, for study programs, for anything in the U.S., their visas required vetting through the Department of Justice, and in fact through the White House National Security Council. That was pretty paper intensive getting detailed information on convictions and rehabilitation. Some people may have had five or six or seven convictions. Sometimes it's as innocuous as being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and sometimes it was pretty heinous crimes. Preparing the visa application material for submission to Washington was time-consuming, but also very interesting to see happen. I can remember that Martin McGuinness, one of the Sinn Féin leaders, was a visa applicant regularly, and we would always follow this long process to secure permission to issue him a limited visa. At the time I went to Belfast, Gerry Adams, who was the head of the Sinn Féin political party, did his visa applications at the Embassy in Dublin—that was the capital of Ireland, as he saw it. So, politically that was where he should apply rather than in a consulate that was part of the U.S. Mission to the United Kingdom. One of the things that I worked on was trying to of get him back into coming into the consulate in Belfast. I had heard that his first visa to the U.S., perhaps in the mid-nineties, or maybe even a little bit later than that, was issued in Belfast and was so fraught with conditions that he was just absolutely turned off by that process. That plus the political weight that went to applying in Dublin is why he chose there. But, everybody else who would travel with him would apply at the consulate in Belfast. So, step by step, I worked to show his team that we were really neutral, non-threatening. By the end of my tour, he was back to coming into Belfast for his visa applications and his visa interview, which was a terrific boost for our consul general who could actually do the interview. I would provide her the questions that we needed for Washington. But then she could take the opportunity to have a sit down chat with Gerry Adams on all kinds of political issues going on in Northern Ireland. So, that is one of the accomplishments that I was particularly proud of: being able to support the consul general and giving her an opportunity to have more regular private meetings with the leader of Sinn Féin.

This was also the time where Consular Affairs and the State Department were moving more towards electronic communications, electronic files. That was kind of an ongoing process in the consular section. For example, being able to communicate with American citizens living in Northern Ireland by email was a real boost. Before, it had either been by telephone or probably letter. And now you could actually have written communication back and forth on the same day. That was a great bit of progress I thought. For my entire tour, we issued emergency U.S. passports by typing in the personal information on a typewriter, using a hand-embosser to apply the seal, and an electric iron to affix the photograph. Could it have been any more primitive?

Q: While you were there, were you able to see any economic development going on in Northern Ireland as a result of the Good Friday Agreement?

MANRING: Great question. Absolutely. For example, we arrived there in July of 2000, and that was shortly after the curfew had been lifted for Belfast. We could still see the drop-down metal bars on streets that would have been lowered and used to close streets during the curfew time, but they were not used while we were there. We saw restaurants and cafés open, starting to use outside seating, for example, around some of the parks or the plazas. That had not been the case for quite some time in Northern Ireland. People were able to go to stores without having to walk through metal detectors or without being searched with a scanner before going in. So, those were things that really struck us. Plus, the attitude of the people was so positive that they felt like they had turned a corner and that the period of extreme violence was over. It didn't just end overnight. There was still lessening violence, whether it was kneecapping, or whether it was assassinations, or bombings. Those were still going on, but less and less and less as we moved further into the Peace Process implementation.

We could also see by the number of foreign tourists coming to Belfast. I wouldn't say it was a sharp increase, but it was a steady increase. I think foreigners felt that it was now safe—or safer—to travel there. Hotels were beginning to sort of cater to foreigners while we were there. The first cruise ship docked in, I think it was Derry/Londonderry in the north, and now there are dozens of cruise ships stopping in Belfast alone every year. So, that was the beginning of that kind of a change.

Q: Were there any sort of other visible small things, cultural activities, sports that that began to pick up? Things that happened outside?

MANRING: Certainly. So, again, while we were there, the border to Ireland became open, so there was more and easier traffic flow between Dublin and Belfast. There were more Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland activities together. For example, I remember attending the first meeting of the Northern Irish Medical Association and the Republic of Ireland Medical Association at a pretty nice country resort; I think that was just over the border in the northern part of the Republic of Ireland. But, that was the first time in decades that something as benign as a group of doctors would get together across the border. So, there was a lot more of that sort of thing starting to happen. And again, the

consulate's role was to encourage, support, and if we needed to, facilitate those kinds of things. That was really tremendous to see.

Q: Alright. It's been a very interesting three years for you there, but had you begun to think about a next post?

MANRING: Before answering your question, let me mention that I felt Belfast was a good family posting. The schools were good and instruction was in English and there were good employment opportunities for spouses/partners. My wife had a clerical job at Queens University, close to our house, which she enjoyed.

Back to your question about our onward assignment. Up to this time, I had been coned management. Through the assignment in Belfast, I became more interested in the consular cone, and part of the reason was that because of new visa fees, the Bureau of Consular Affairs had a pretty large pot of money that they spent on training for officers (such as more language training); on computer and office equipment for officers and staff; on regional conferences for officers and staff. None of that was happening on the management side; there just wasn't the money to do those kinds of things. By the end of my tour in Belfast, then, I had switched cones to consular.

Q: Okay, so now we were talking about what your criterion was or what you were thinking about for your next assignment after Northern Ireland.

MANRING: Exactly. You know, I want to add one other comment about the tour in Northern Ireland before I jump onto the next tour, and that was President Clinton and his family had a farewell official trip to Northern Ireland in early December of 2000. It was kind of his way to wrap up the work that he had done there. British Prime Minister Tony Blair was up. They had meetings, but it was basically a celebratory trip for him before he left office. And it was while he was in Northern Ireland at the Hilton Hotel in Belfast that he had his now-famous telephone call with Vice President Al Gore where he finally recommended to Al Gore that he not further fight the election results of the November, 2000 election. As you may remember, that presidential election had a pretty contentious outcome and there were lots of lawsuits in various courts. That was when and where that happened.

President Clinton (center, blue tie) during his last visit to Northern Ireland while President in early December, 2000. Here, he is standing with the staff of the U.S. Consulate General Belfast and Embassy London staff who were temporarily in Belfast to support his visit. Bea Lüben Manring (my wife) is the second person on President Clinton's left in the front row. I was on assignment at Air Force 1 at the Belfast Airport and was not in this photograph.

On to thinking about the next assignment. I was now a consular officer. I was looking at consular positions that would involve a higher level of management than I had been doing in Hamburg and in Belfast. I had been supervising local staff, but no Americans, and I was interested in being in a larger post. Belfast and Hamburg were pretty small consulates. In addition, Northern Ireland is really rainy. It's drizzly all the time. We didn't have a garage and our car actually started growing moss on the top of it, so my wife and I wanted to go someplace where there was going to be some more regular sun. Those were our guiding criteria. My youngest two sons were going to be with us for the next tour, so we wanted someplace that had a good school for middle school-aged kids as well.

We ended up being assigned to San José, Costa Rica, with me as the deputy consular section chief. As an aside, this would've been the fall of 2002 bidding cycle for 2003 transfers. At that time, the Department had just decided that for assignments to "non-differential" or non-hardship posts, the assignments were going to be for four years

instead of three. I think they were doing this to save money by having people move around less, so I received a four-year assignment to San José, which sounded pretty good. One result that I think the management folks in the Department soon realized was that they suddenly had posts such as Paris, Rome, London, San José, you name it, blocked full for four years, and people coming out of significant hardship posts had nowhere to go except to another hardship post. I think after one year, the Department decided, "Wow, we're not going to continue with this four year assignment policy." But for those of us who had already been assigned and had started our assignments, we could opt to cut it back to a three-year assignment or stay for four years. Because of our sons, we opted to stay there for four years.

So, San José, Costa Rica. I was there from August, 2003 to June of 2007. I was the deputy consular section chief. This is my first time supervising and rating officers. Also, I was frequently the acting consul general. Certainly a lot more supervisory experience than I had in consular sections in the past. The portfolio in San José included non-immigrant visas, immigrant visas, American Citizen Services, and it also had a judicial assistance portfolio. The Department of Justice had no representation in Costa Rica except for a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) unit, which was focused on drug interdiction. So, for things such as prison transfers and extraditions, the consular section worked as the liaison between the U.S. agencies, generally in Washington DC, and their Costa Rican counterparts. That was a new aspect of consular work for me and there aren't very many posts in the world where that's the case.

Q: In those sorts of situations, were you also working with the regional security officer?

MANRING: Certainly. Although really, his role was more as an observer being kept in the loop. His work was primarily with us for working-level law enforcement as opposed to interacting with higher level Department of Justice people who worked on extraditions. I think, in Costa Rica, I supervised between five and seven officers, all first and second tour officers. During part of my tour, I was also on the housing board, the chairman of the housing board. That was also a new experience for me in getting to know that aspect of how an embassy works, and being part of that. The biggest part of the consular workload there was American Citizen Services. There were a lot of issues with beach safety, and there were a lot of rip tides on both coasts, as well as theft against tourists.

Q: Wow.

MANRING: The Pacific coast and the Caribbean coast. The Pacific coast being generally the worst, and the issue with the rip tides was that they were not well – or not at all - posted in Costa Rica. We often, or regularly, had cases of energetic American tourists — and this also happened to other foreign tourists— who flew to Costa Rica for a nice beach vacation. They drive to the coast and see this incredible, pristine beach with long stretches of sand with almost nothing on them, and great water. Almost immediately, they dive in and go for a swim, and then suddenly get hit with a rip tide. So our aim was trying to get that publicized both in the States and also through hotel chains and travel agencies

in Costa Rica to make sure that Americans arriving there knew to talk to their hosts or hotels about beach safety before jumping into the water.

Another issue was international parental child abductions. That was an issue that had come to the fore recently within the State Department due to at least one international treaty (the Hague Convention). In Costa Rica, there was a bias in the government and in the judiciary, that the best place in the world to raise a child was Costa Rica, regardless of any norms set out by the international community.

Q: Huh.

MANRING: Regardless of court documents from other countries, which said the custody was to be in the U.S. with the U.S. parent(s), Costa Rican courts would routinely ignore that, not give weight to those kinds of decrees and orders, and support Costa Rican parents for having children remain in Costa Rica. Working this issue involved a lot of interaction with the Bureau of Consular Affairs to come up with programs to educate politicians, societal influencers, and judges in Costa Rica on how this works internationally. Our point was that Costa Rica needed to honor its international treaty obligations. It certainly took time, but by the time I left, we were starting to have success in some of these disputes, but they really did take a long time.

Another issue that was significant in the American Citizen Services realm was theft of U.S. passports. Again, I think tourists —and this wasn't just Americans, this was also European tourists coming to Costa Rica— have this image of very benign jungles and beaches, where you can just pop out of your car and go for a hike on the beach or in the cloud forest, and not really think about "Have I left my purse on the seat of my car? Have I locked my car? Have I left my suitcase on the seat of my car? Is my car locked?" And regularly – literally almost daily, there were thefts of luggage and/or purses, or things that held passports; and in addition to other valuables, it was always the passport which was targeted. Of course, that meant that to return to the U.S., citizens would have to come from wherever they were in the country to the embassy, and apply for an emergency U.S. passport to leave Costa Rica and come back to the U.S. In 2004, for example, this was so prevalent that our post was the fourth highest post for replacing stolen passports that the Department of State had. I think we were behind Paris, London, and either Rome or Barcelona. Of course, those geographic areas had many more tourists than Costa Rica had, so you can imagine the percentage of theft was higher in Costa Rica. Again, that led to a lot of putting our heads together with the regional security officers and their staff, the local tourist officials —because Costa Rica had a tourism ministry in its national government— with folks back in the States, and the Bureau of Consular Affairs trying to come up with ways to educate tourists. You know, "Don't leave things where they can be seen in your car. Always make sure your car is locked. Keep a copy of your passport with you and use that where you need to rather than using your original passport. Keep your original passport locked up in a hotel safe." Those kinds of things. We got to the point where we actually had handouts for people at the immigration counters, where they entered the country through the airports in two main international airports.

The theft of so many U.S. and western European passports had clear border security implications. Where were the passports going and were they being altered and/or reused? As I mentioned, this was a common problem not only for American tourists, but also for those from every major Western European country as well.

Working to reduce these thefts —I have to say— was a lot of fun. The Costa Rican government officials, including law enforcement, were very willing to cooperate. They had very little money, but they understood that foreign tourism, including from the U.S. and Europe, was a huge part of their economic well-being, and they wanted to try to minimize anything that would negatively impact that. So, during the time I was there, we led in that work, pulling together consular colleagues from other embassies in San Jose, working with the National Tourism Chamber of Commerce, and working with the Costa Rican Department of Tourism. In 2003 or early 2004, we began tabulating numbers of U.S. passport thefts, then we expanded that to include German, French, Dutch, and U.K. passport thefts. The numbers spoke for themselves: yes, there is a problem. In every meeting with local officials or hotel owners, the data we had was convincing. All of this work, with the support of our ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission, was tremendous. Again, slow work, but fantastic to see this diverse network of people all interested in, and working towards the same goal.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.

MANRING: Nope, I was just going to say that those were the highlights of my tour in San Jose.

Q: Those are the security aspects, which obviously are very important, but did you have to also deal with public affairs issues like disgruntled visa applicants?

MANRING: I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch the tail end of that question.

Q: Did you have to deal with public affairs issues like people who were unhappy about visa decisions?

MANRING: Certainly. I think every consular manager has to deal with those kinds of issues. But honestly, in Costa Rica, those were minimal. I think most people who applied for visas, received them. Costa Rica had a pretty good economy at that time. The overwhelming majority of people who travelled to the U.S. came back to Costa Rica. Often, going to Miami for shopping was the main reason for a visa, and those are the kinds of people that are pretty easy visa decisions. So there wasn't a lot of disgruntlement with visa decisions. Thankfully.

Q: You mentioned the rip tides. Were there in that case many death cases that you had to deal with? That side of U.S. Citizens (Services).

MANRING: Yes, there certainly were, and it ranged from individuals to groups. I can remember one case was a group of high school students and their chaperones from a very

small town in Kansas. They were doing their senior-post-graduation trip and again, drove to the Pacific coast after arriving in the country, went to the hotel, put on swimming trunks and everybody heads out to the water. With the rip tide, I can remember, it was something like four or five people died, including at least one of the chaperones who was a parent going in to try to save her son or daughter. Dealing with those kinds of cases was, unfortunately, regular, and generally, one of the entry level officers would actually be on the front line: going out to the scene, working with whomever was there, and also in contact with folks back in the States. I would be very closely supervising and if need be, I'd be on the phone. Those were really, really sad cases.

Q: You had mentioned that consular sections almost financed themselves in some ways because they're allowed to keep a portion of the fees for upgrading training and such. Were any of the electronic upgrades now really beginning to take more of an effect? Did that change the way you did business?

MANRING: Certainly. During this period of time, the early 2000s, the Bureau of Consular Affairs, and I think the State Department at large, was implementing more and more electronic processes, particularly, in the visa realm. Name checks, for example. That made it a lot easier for officers to work through visa cases as well as, to a certain extent, American Citizen Services cases. So really, the impact was not changing the way visas were processed, but making it flow faster.

Q: With all the work that you did advertising the need for caution on beaches and so on, did you see over the time a reduction in the number of people affected by it?

MANRING: Good question. I believe by the end of my tour we started to see the numbers go down. Although, I have to say, part of the problem was also that the number of tourists coming in was going up, so we might see a percentage drop, but the actual number of people drowning was not.

Q: Yeah.

MANRING: In some particularly bad beach areas, we had hotels starting to post notices on the beach. They tend not to stay up for very long. They get washed away or somebody comes along and takes a sign, but at least that was a start in trying to get hotels to understand that they had a responsibility for the safety of their guests.

Q: Aside from that, over the period of time you were there, you acquired more managerial skills, more supervisory skills. During that time, did you have to deal with difficult personnel issues that would require you to counsel people and so on? How did you handle that?

MANRING: Again, very good question. Certainly that was part and parcel of being in the management end of consular work. There was a fair amount of counseling with entry-level officers because they were first tour officers. They were brand new to the Foreign Service. There were second tour officers, but often their earlier experience was very

different from what they were seeing in Costa Rica. Working with officers on how to do visa interviews, you know, how to focus on questions that are really hitting the nail on the head of what you need to know to make a decision, both on the immigrant visa side and the non-immigrant visa side. That was pretty much ongoing. Also with American Citizen Services cases. If I was assigning an officer to a drowning case or visiting an American in a hospital or a psychiatric institute, I would sit down with that person first and sort of walk through things I would be doing. I'd suggest some things s/he may think about doing. Giving that sort of counseling or almost mentoring, was good for me, and also good for the officer. But I don't remember any really sticky human resources issues per se with the officers. Every now and then, we'd have an officer in the Section who did not want to be doing non-immigrant visa work and resented that part of his or her assignment. In those situations, I'd try to help the officer see the value of the work to her/his career and understanding of our host-country's culture. I recall one officer who either invented or exaggerated a knee or ankle injury and used that as a reason to try to get out of standing at the visa interview window to do interviews. It sounded convincing until the officer – who loved golf – managed to play all 18 holes of a local golf tournament without complaint or slowness.

With the local staff the same thing – few major human resources issues. Some of the local staff were not particularly productive and perhaps had been there too long and lost their enthusiasm. I think that's the case in any office setting anywhere around the world. Generally, working with those people was left up to the local Foreign Service national managers, so I wasn't particularly involved in any of those kinds of issues, thankfully.

Q: As you were the acting consul general there for a while, or head of the consular section, did you have a lot of representational responsibilities?

MANRING: I wouldn't say there was a lot, but there was a steady amount of representational activities. Again, the national government there was relatively small. Most of the embassies that were there, were also relatively small, so there wasn't the volume of representational activities that you would find in a larger city or a larger embassy setting.

Q: Did your job permit you to improve your Spanish language skills?

MANRING: Sorry, the volume is really low and I don't know if it's on my side or on your side.

Q: All right. Is this any better for you?

MANRING: No, not really.

Q: Hmm. I'm not sure why. I can hear you fine.

MANRING: Okay. Then that's okay. Your question was?

Q: Whether you had the opportunity with your job to improve your Spanish language skills.

MANRING: Absolutely. I'm trying to remember. I had, at least for the first couple of years, a tutor who worked with me a couple of times a week, during the evenings. It must've been because there wasn't a post language program. But certainly working on my Spanish was always something that I was interested in doing. I think I was able to get up to a three plus/three plus or a three plus/four while I was there. A four-year tour in a Spanish speaking country was a pretty good opportunity for working language skills, although I will say within the Costa Rican government, probably 90% of government officials spoke English. Many of them were educated at U.S. universities, either for their undergraduate degrees or masters or doctorate degrees. In the tourism industry, again, many people spoke fluent English, so it wasn't particularly necessary. But I felt it was a good thing to do, and I was interested in getting my Spanish scores moved up as high as I could while I was there.

Q: Because this was a somewhat unusually long tour for the Foreign Service. Four years. Were you sent out on TDY for any other activity, outside of the embassy in San Jose?

MANRING: Yes, I had occasion to attend one or two consular regional conferences. I remember going to one in Lima, Peru. I had occasion to go back to Washington, DC for a consular training during the summers as well. The consul general, my boss the first two years, was Robin Moritz and the last two years was David Dreher. Robin instituted a policy of trying to get all officers to do a temporary assignment (TDY) at another post in the region, during the fall, using end-of-year money, if available. I was able to take advantage of that one time and went to Mexico City. That was pretty nice; it was the first time that I'd been back there.

Mexico City has a huge consular section and there were always things that they were doing that we could learn from in Costa Rica. It was a very good experience, and at that time, we were working towards a call center contract. The Bureau of Consular Affairs was requiring all posts to have call centers for information. I don't remember if it was also for scheduling visa appointments at that time or not. The call center that the Bureau of Consular Affairs wanted us to use was in Mexico, near Mexico City. That was another reason to go there, to check out the call center and talk with their staff. Their people in Costa Rico were a little concerned that the dialect of Spanish they would be using to answer questions was going to be a Mexican dialect rather than a Costa Rican dialect. That was by and large the case, but at least we conveyed to the call center manager that where there was a possibility to assign someone who could understand and respond in a Costa Rican dialect of Spanish that would be better received by Costa Rican users.

Q: Very good.

MANRING: There were also a lot of opportunities to do TDY trips within country. Costa Rica is not very large, but getting out and seeing it, meeting with local officials, explaining to them some of our concerns about safety and that sort of thing was a pretty

constant part of the job. Another thing that I found interesting in Costa Rica was that radio was a very popular medium of communication, so either I, or other officers, when traveling often worked through our public affairs office at the Embassy to set up radio interviews. That gave us opportunities where we could talk about visa processing or beach safety or passport safety. That was the first time I had done very many radio interviews, also in Spanish. I thought that was great experience for entry level officers who had good Spanish command; it was a great opportunity for them to start practicing public speaking.

Q: Now did your wife want to work? And was she able to?

MANRING: She did not work. She did some volunteer work while we were there, at least in the initial year or two. But she didn't work and part of the issue for her was that all she had, was some Spanish from university days. It wasn't fluent, and to work in the local economy, you really had to be fluent in Spanish. That was a real limiting factor, and so she really wasn't looking for a job over there.

Q: All right, so a good four years in Costa Rica. What are you thinking about towards the end of that tour?

MANRING: Okay. Looking at the progression of my career, I had been overseas: Costa Rica was my fourth consecutive overseas assignment. I knew career-wise I needed to get back and spend some time in Washington, DC at the State Department's mothership so to speak. So I bid only on Washington positions and accepted one as a desk officer in the Bureau of European Affairs' Office of Policy and Global Issue. That's where I went in July of 2007, and I was there for two years, until July of 2009.

Q: Okay. I'm going to pause for a second.

[The interview skipped Nick Manring's two back-to-back tours in Washington, DC, so he has added the following text to cover those assignments.]

MANRING: My two years in the Bureau of European Affairs gave me the chance to see close-up the workings of a "bureau" - a subdivision of the Department of State. The office was essentially a catch-all for topic and issues which didn't fit squarely into another office. And, we worked closely with the Bureau's top staff: the assistant secretary and the deputy assistant secretaries. My portfolio included working a U.S. policy for the Black Sea region, promoting anti-corruption work throughout Europe, organizing the annual conference for the 50+ deputy chiefs of mission at our European embassies, and trying to ease the burden on Bureau staff of doing Leahy Vetting.

Much of the work I did set me up well for my final assignment, as political advisor to the U.S. Army commanding general in Wiesbaden. Through my work in the European Affairs Bureau, I knew officers at most of our embassies in Europe, and I knew the top personnel in Washington, DC.

While we were in Washington, DC, my wife took a job in the Consular Section of the German Embassy as personal assistant to the Consul General, we bought a house on Capitol Hill, and we were able to see our kids more often. So, we decided to stay in Washington for a second tour. After two years in European Affairs then, I took another two-year assignment in the Bureau of Legislative Affairs doing consular-related congressional liaison work.

I lucked-out in my timing in that before I started, the incumbents spent a great deal of time on individual visa cases with Congressional staff. A friend or relative of a constituent had been denied a visa to come to the U.S. and the constituent asked her or his member of Congress for help. These were never-ending cases and time-consuming because of their sheer volume. When I started my job in Legislative Affairs, the Bureau of Consular Affairs started assigning a consular officer to handle these congressional inquiries. That freed me to concentrate on policy and legislative issues of importance to the Consular Affairs senior staff. This included issues surrounding the disposition of passport fees, visa fee amounts, legislation to require federal agencies to share certain information with State's passport operation to ensure passports were not issued to law enforcement fugitives, for example. Other issues included a push by Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu to rewrite the State Department's role in international adoptions, congressional interest in how other countries were implementing the Hague Convention on International Parental Child Abductions, and occasional bursts at comprehensive immigration reform. Following the December 25, 2009 attempted bombing of an airline over Detroit by Nigerian national and U.S.-visa-holder Omar Farouk Abdulmutallab (who became known as the Underwear Bomber because of where he had hidden his bomb), there was a great deal of congressional activity focused on whether the State Department was doing a good enough job screening visa applicants and whether the visa function should be placed with the Department of Homeland Security. We had at least a dozen briefings for Congressional committee staff as well as full hearings before a number of committees or subcommittees. My role was to work with the presenting or testifying Consular Affairs principal on testimony, practice questioning, providing them background on the staff and members of Congress they would be speaking to, etc. It was often incredibly intense, but it gave me essentially direct access to the top personnel in the Bureau of Consular Affairs and the iconic Undersecretary for Management Patrick Kennedy (who oversaw the Bureau of Consular Affairs). It also gave me a much clearer understanding of the role of Congress in the conduct and funding of U.S. foreign policy. Honestly, I would recommend a tour in Legislative Affairs for any officer wanting to do well in the senior ranks of the Department.

During my time in the Bureau of Legislative Affairs, the Bureau's Assistant Secretary Rich Verma led the Administration's effort to have the Senate ratify the New START treaty with Russia. It was nip-and-tuck through the Senate process, but in December 2010, ratification happened. It was fascinating for me to see how well-organized the effort was and the top-level State Department engagements with almost every Senator. It was an excellent case-study on how to work with Congress to achieve one of the Administration's top foreign policy goals.

Another success story from my work in that assignment had to do with the Bureau of Consular Affairs' leadership's desire to have all the Bureau's offices in Washington, DC in the same building. At the time, the offices were spread out in maybe five or six buildings in the Foggy Bottom part of Washington, DC, making attending meetings more time-consuming than optimal. The Bureau, working through the Undersecretary for Management had located a large building on Pennsylvania Avenue not far from the Harry S. Truman State Department HQ building. It was owned by the World Bank, which was not using it. By law, the lease of a building either over a benchmark sum or over a benchmark size required the approval of one Senate and one House subcommittee. The staff of both subcommittees wanted to see that consolidating the Bureau into one building would save the USG money, and there were Virginia and Maryland members of Congress on both subcommittees who wanted any move of USG offices to be a move into their state's part of the DC suburbs. The District of Columbia's Representative, Eleanor Holmes Norton, sat on the House subcommittee, but, of course, she had no vote, and therefore little influence. We had to compile a lot of information on the existing and projected rental costs and show not only that it would save money, but also that a move of the Bureau to the suburbs would not save money either. The data wasn't very clear cut and our efforts involved multiple briefings by the Undersecretary to subcommittee staff. Eventually, we secured the approval and the Bureau of Consular Affairs is now in the building – newly remodeled, close to the rest of the State Department, and for the first time in decades, consolidated.

Secretary Clinton and Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) open the first State Department office in one of the Senate office buildings in February or March 2010 - a priority for both the Secretary and the Bureau of Consular Affairs, which would staff the office to work constituent inquiries. Consular Affairs Assistant Secretary Janice Jacobs is to the Secretary's right and Nick Manring is at the window in the back, just above the Secretary's right ear.

Following two years in Legislative Affairs, my wife and I wanted to go back overseas and the Bureau of Consular Affairs offered me the position of Consular Section Chief in Chennai, India. I needed to do another hardship posting to meet the requirements for promotion into the senior Foreign Service and India would fulfill that. Chennai's Consular Section was huge – about 65 local staff and 24 officers (larger than many entire posts) - and it was a senior Foreign Service position, i.e., above my rank.

Q: Today is June 26th and we're resuming our interview with Nick Manring about his tour in Chennai (formerly Madras), India. When do you arrive?

MANRING: Let's see. I arrived in July of 2011. I'm not exactly sure of the date. I believe it was just after the 4th of July. My arrival was timed in part because there was a Secretary of State visit (Secretary Clinton) happening in Chennai and the outgoing consul general wanted me to be there on the ground to help support that. We arrived in July of 2011 and then left in mid-July of 2014. It was a three-year assignment. Chennai during

that period was a post of about 44 Foreign Service direct-hire personnel, and about 197 to 200 locally engaged staff. Of those, 24 direct hire officers were in the consular section, including myself as the consular section chief. I think we had a little over 65 local staff, also in the consular section. I was a Foreign Service rank O-1, and this was a Senior Foreign Service position, so what is called a stretch position as a consular section chief. When I arrived at Post, I was also made the deputy consul general. There was a need for that, and I fit the bill in the view of the Deputy Chief of Mission in New Delhi and the incoming consul general, so I wore two hats.

In the spring of 2011, just before I arrived, there had been a State Department Office of the Inspector General review of the entire U.S. Mission to India. A large part of the State Department's operation in India has to do with consular affairs and visas, specifically white collar worker visas (Hs and Ls). I arrived for the implementation of some of the recommendations from that inspection, including moving the immigrant visa unit that was in Chennai to Mumbai, and moving all processing of a type of non-immigrant visa called "blanket L visas" —which are intercompany transfers, again, white collar worker visas— from all other posts in India to Chennai. So the first thing I had to do was figure out how to do that. I worked with the other consular section chiefs throughout the mission, and also the minister counselor for consular affairs in New Delhi to figure out how to carry out this transfer and, whether there were going to be any personnel consequences, which fortunately there were not. That plus getting my feet on the ground pretty much occupied most of my first year there.

Chennai was, at that time, between the 10th- and the 12th- busiest U.S. overseas non-immigrant visa issuing post, and we were doing between 800 and 1,000 non-immigrant visa interviews a day. It was a pretty big operation. The consular district for Chennai included the three most-southern states of India: Tamil Nadu, where Chennai's the capital city; Karnataka, where Bangalore, now called Bengaluru, is located; and then on the west coast of India, the state of Kerala. I did a lot of traveling within the consular district, getting to know these three states and doing a lot of outreach and public speaking. There was a huge interest in visas related to employment throughout South India, so there was a real demand for knowledgeable people from the consulate to come out and talk. There were also a lot of urban areas as there are all over India, so numerous cities with populations of over a million and many cities with populations in the hundreds of thousands. Many had some kind of Chamber of Commerce. Those were the targets. We also were doing a lot of students visas, and were promoting international students going to the U.S. to college. We supported a number of U.S. universities which would send delegations to India on recruitment tours. There were international student exchange fairs, and in those events, there was often an interest in having a knowledgeable speaker come and talk about the student visa process, and what happens after you get to the States on a student visa, et cetera. I did a lot of that kind of outreach, as did many of the officers in our section.

I also had some great officers both at the mid-level, directly underneath me, and at the entry-level, and I tried to get all of these officers out to events and for public speaking as often as I could. We did a lot of online outreach using social media, which was very new

for all of us in the State Department at that time. We had an excellent public diplomacy section that supported us and encouraged us to do Twitter, Facebook, web chats.... I'm sure there were many more than I can't remember at the moment. It was really a lot of fun for me as an officer, and it was great to see our entry-level and our mid-level officers engaging with this new type of outreach. In a place like India, you can easily reach thousands of listeners or viewers or customers, so to speak.

Q: I want to ask one question regarding your job as deputy consul general. What other U.S. government agencies or entities were at the consulate that you had to interact with?

MANRING: Sure. Primarily, that was the Department of Commerce. Well, there were the State Department's normal sections: a very small POL/ECON [Political/Economic] section with two officers. The Management section had two to three officers. The Public Diplomacy section had three officers, and then, there was Department of Commerce. There was one officer, and a fairly good number of local staff, and they also had an office in Bangalore, that we would also use as our base when we were there doing outreach. For a while, CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] had a representative at post. I think in my last six months that office closed. They were doing HIV prevention education and had a program with the state of Tamil Nadu that apparently was quite successful. Periodically, there would be other non-State Department USG personnel coming down from the embassy, for example, the foreign agricultural service staff would sometimes come down. But I have to say it was mostly Department of Commerce that I worked with outside of the State Department.

Q: Were there particular sectors that commerce was active with? Particular sectors of U.S. exports or encouraging Indian investment?

MANRING: While I was there, their focus was on encouraging Indian investment in the U.S. Although they did also participate in student outreach because they saw that as a type of investment in the U.S. to encourage students, university students to consider U.S. universities for their education. Naturally the IT sector is a big one. There are a lot of cross links. A lot of American IT companies have offices in South India.

One of the things I thought was really interesting was how U.S. IT companies used their Indian offices for some of their research. In the U.S., they could task the Indian office to do something on a quick turnaround. Because of the time difference - it was about a 12 hour time difference from west coast of U.S. to the east coast of India, the Indian staff would be working during the day on the tasking while it was night in the U.S., so when U.S. team gets up and is in the office in the morning, they had their response from India. In effect, the offices in India helped make their operations in the U.S. 24-hour-a-day operations.

Tamil Nadu was also a heavy industry area; automobiles, trucks, and heavy machinery were manufactured there. There were linkages in that sector that Commerce Department staff kept an eye on as well. Agricultural imports to a lesser extent. India at that time was

importing a fairly large number of apples from the U.S., I can remember the Washington State Apple Commission having some events going on there.

Q: Okay. And then, just a couple of other, sort of more deputy consul general questions, as you went out into the provinces, did the public affairs section have many American corners for you to visit?

MANRING: Yes. They were just putting that program together while I was there. I was at a number of the openings of American corners. Another way to draw people to those corners was not only to talk about the American corner itself, but to have somebody talk about business visas to the U.S. I can remember being at the opening of the American corner in Trivandrum in the state of Kerala. I attended an opening for one in the southern part of the state of Tamil Nadu as well. I don't remember if that was in Coimbatore or Madurai. In addition, we used the one in Bangalore for some of our visa-related press events. There, we had a really nice, kind of library setting with lots of books in the backdrop.

Q: Now also you're in the southernmost part of India and there had been, of course in Sri Lanka a great deal of civil strife, civil unrest, civil war with ethnic groups that also had a presence in South India. Were there concerns about political instability in your region?

MANRING: Certainly not in terms of Indian institutions. By the time I was there, the events - or the civil war - in Sri Lanka had pretty much died down. I don't remember off hand when there was a ceasefire and some kind of a peace agreement entered into, but there was not an active civil war when I was there. There were links back and forth between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, of course, because of the Tamil minority population in Sri Lanka, and in Tamil Nadu there were some refugee camps for Tamilians who had been displaced in Sri Lanka. I know at one point the consulate had a very small grant from, I think the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the State Department to help some of the people in at least one of the refugee camps acquire the right kind of documentation for them to be able to return to Sri Lanka. Many of them fled with no papers at all. So, the Sri Lankan government wanted to make sure that they were really Sri Lankans in order to allow them to return to Sri Lanka. Securing – and paying for - the right documentation was a bit of a bureaucratic mess, but it was good to see some NGOs and some folks from the consulate willing to help out.

Q: And speaking of NGOs, did the U.S. also have a USAID or Peace Corps presence in your consulate district?

MANRING: No, although I believe that CDC was using USAID funds for their HIV educational work during this period. That was the only USAID presence in south India. There was no Peace Corps presence. I'm not even sure there was Peace Corps all in India while I was there.

Q: The other sort of funds that you can sometimes get a hold of from the Department are cultural restoration funds, you know, either the U.S. ambassador or the consul general funds, did you have any of that?

MANRING: You know, we certainly did. I was not a part of that, but some of the Public Diplomacy staff identified a library in Mysore, which is in the state of Karnataka, essentially smack dab in the middle of our consular district that needed help. I think the building was literally falling down around the manuscripts, which were palm leaf manuscripts which can degenerate very quickly. Mysore used to be the capital city of a south Indian kingdom. I think that's why the library was there and it dated to that period. So through work of some of the consulate employees using the ambassadors fund, the library received $50,000 to do some work on the building. I don't remember if it was a new roof or rebuilding at least a few rooms so that they were weather resistant. Anyway, heavy rains, high humidity, high heat, those kinds of things are disastrous on old, fragile documents and books. That was great to see the consulate helping with that kind of activity.

Q: And did you have concerns that were either realized or not about terrorism?

MANRING: Certainly I had concerns on terrorism. Not big concerns, but the Consulate was a building, I think, built in, 1969 and as our Deputy Chief of Mission, Donald Lu, described it, it was the "ugliest building in the Foreign Service inventory." It looked like nothing had been done to it since it was built. I mean, I'm sure there had been maintenance and cleaning done over the years, but it just looked really, awful on the outside: really a dirty, grimy. When it was built, the consulate building probably had a reasonable amount of setback. But since then, an elevated highway had been built maybe 75 feet away from the building on one side. Since then, there were major city roads on two of the four sides and one of those roads was an elevated highway at eye level with the second story of our building.

And of course, we didn't have bulletproof glass or anything like that. So, certainly it was pretty easy to see that there was a physical security vulnerability there. We did from time to time discuss with the South and Central Asia Bureau - that was our "mother bureau," as well as the Overseas Building Operations folks in Washington the need for a new building that met setback requirements. There were a couple of problems with moving to safer location. First, as is often the case, it is the city-center location versus going out in the suburbs. That would mean a lot more commuting and in a heavily traffic-congested city like Chennai, not the best situation for officers and local staff who need regular contact with offices that are in the city center. The second problem was that the consulate was on ground that belonged to the Anglican Church of South India. That organization's cathedral was adjacent to the consulate. Incidentally, there was no control over who had access to the cathedral grounds. So that was another area where we had a pretty good-sized vulnerability. Anybody could just go on the cathedral grounds and walk right up to our perimeter wall. The USG has a-99 year lease with the Anglican Church, done perhaps in the 1960s at some incredibly low amount of money, something like $100 - or less - per year. So when you're looking at U.S. dollars, taxpayer dollars, at work, we couldn't get a

piece of ground for anywhere near that price these days. That dollars-and-cents aspect always tipped the scales in favor of staying where we were because it would cost so much to get the same amount of real estate any place else in the city or its suburbs. Those were the two things that were sort of factored into a new building: how far out would it be and what would that mean for a commute; and two, how do you convince budget-focused people in Washington to walk away from $100 or less lease per year?

Also throughout India there is a Muslim minority population. We had the same thing in Chennai. There were several times that there were anti-American street riots or protests by the Muslim community and we'd have to close down some of the public operations of the consulate for safety reasons. Safety both of our officers and staff, and of the visiting public. In September of 2012, on the 14th of September, there was a large Muslim, anti-American protest in reaction to a film that was being produced in the United States called Innocence of Muslims. And in fact, the crowd quickly got much larger and much more rowdy than police anticipated. Having come from Friday prayers at a large mosque that was maybe a mile away from the consulate, protestors started trying to climb the consulate's perimeter walls, taking stones and throwing them at the consulate. We were able to evacuate the consulate completely maybe about 20 to 30 minutes before the protesters reached us, but that was close.

Fortunately, we sent most officers and staff home, and then a few of us decamped to the consul general's residence a few miles away, which was our alternative command center. This happened at a time when the consul general happened to be out of town. So, I was the acting principal officer and that was pretty tense. We didn't really know if anybody had had penetrated the grounds and if they had, had they done any damage, et cetera, et cetera. It wasn't until the next day that the ambassador in New Delhi allowed us to go back in. A few people got to go back in with our regional security officer and his staff to assess the damage. I think there were some things broken along the perimeter fence, some of the wire taken down, there were some burnt effigies thrown over the wall, lots of stones thrown at the consulate. I don't remember now if there was any broken glass. We were closed for several days as our security team worked with this Tamil Nadu state police to come up with some kind of a security posture that would help ensure that this would not happen again. That's a long way of answering your question about terrorism. Certainly, those kinds of things, whether it is direct anti-American terrorism, or anti-American demonstrations that could turn bad quickly, those things were always a concern. That was also when the Tamil Nadu state police decided to post police outside some of our homes – including mine – 24/7 to supplement the local guard force the consulate had. At first, there were two policemen at my house, then after about six months, it was reduced to one, and remained that way until I departed Post in July 2014.

Q: Because you mentioned this particular episode, obviously that's the worst end of insecurity or expressions of anti-Americanism, but did you also have to deal through public diplomacy with sort of the traditional urban myths that the U.S. is involved in all kinds of, you know, illegal or gruesome activities, that become rumor and then sort of take on a life of their own?

MANRING: I'm just trying to think. I don't think so, I don't remember any particular issues like that. I do know that in some of our student outreach we often were asked about gun violence on campuses and gun violence in U.S. cities and sexual assault on U.S. college campuses. Certainly, for Indian parents and particularly Indian parents of daughters interested in going to the U.S., these were legitimate concerns. Those are the things that, of course, show up on page one or two of the local press in a place like India.

Q: Let me segue from that to your contribution to the human rights report. Because as much as the parents of young women in India might be concerned about sending them to the U.S., young women in India face far more violence in India, from reporting I've seen, than they do in the United States. So, in your part of the human rights report, what did you focus on?

MANRING: I didn't have anything to do with the human rights report. I know that our POL/ECON section provided some input and I'm sure I reviewed it, but honestly I don't remember the details. That was really a project at the Embassy in New Delhi. While I was in Chennai, there were few incidents of outrageous violence against women in our consular district, as opposed to more northern India, where that kind of violence was unfortunately almost common.

Q: Okay. Then, those are the sort of all the other duties that you have as the deputy consul general, but as to go back now to the head of the consular section, were the changes in technology improving the way you could do service or how would you characterize that?

MANRING: Yes, certainly there were lots of changes coming in technology in the consular world. For example, we were able to move fingerprinting out of the consulate and the fingerprints could be done by a contractor at a service center a few blocks away. They could do the data inputting from the application forms as well. Then, eventually the applications actually had to be done online. The off-site contractor would do the checking of those to make sure that everything was filled in that needed to be filled in. That entire package – application, fingerprints, photos, would come to the consulate electronically for more processing. When the applicant came in for the interview, there'd be a check of one finger of the fingerprint set to make sure it was really the same person who had been at the offsite with the contractor.

So there were things like that that aided the technical aspect of processing and which allowed our staff to really focus on the substance of the visa issuance itself and not so much the clerical issue of whether the application is complete or not, is the photograph a good photograph, are the fingerprints the right ones and are they clear enough that they will be able to be transmitted through the consular affair system back to the various checks in the U.S. So, certainly there were lots of things like that coming along incrementally all the time.

It was also interesting being in a place like India where our relatively large pool of young entry level officers and the relatively young local staff were very knowledgeable on IT

things; oftentimes they could suggest, "geez, why don't we do x?" So to a certain extent, we were always looking at new ways to use evolving technology to improve our work. But also, most of our visa applicants were IT university graduates going to work in the IT sector in the U.S., so you knew that these folks also knew what the potential was for using electronic software and hardware to help out the process. That was on the visa side.

We also had in the Consular Section a fairly robust American citizen services section and an anti-fraud unit with a Diplomatic Security officer detailed to it as I think it's called a RSOI (Regional Security Officer Investigator). Then we had a fairly active outreach unit, called the consular information unit, that took care of planning our outreach for us, writing scripts for us, giving us Q and A and practice sessions and that sort of thing.

On the American citizens services front, the backdrop was India as a place that has a lot of disasters, whether they're natural or man-made, whether it's cyclones, tidal waves, train crashes, mudslides, you name it, it can happen. We were very active in monitoring those kinds of events. Our consular district included the Andaman Islands, which are really off the coast of Myanmar and not India. Fortunately we didn't have very many cases out there or reasons to be out there, but there were a few high-end snorkeling and scuba resorts, so there was a steady trickle of American tourists going out that way.

Q: Weren't the Andaman Islands where Margaret Meed went?

MANRING: I think that was New Guinea. I'm sure, populations are very similar. There are quite a number of the Andaman Islands which are totally off limits, not only off limits to foreigners, but off limits to Indians as well. The population does not want to have any contact with the outside and they're pretty strongly violent at protecting that view.

Another aspect of the work in Chennai, in terms of our staff, the consulate was a great sort of incubator for professional development and doing outreach, such as writing articles for local newspapers. Newspapers were still very widely read and circulated in India. So that was a good medium to use, giving officers opportunities to work with the POL/ECON section on drafting cables, doing TDYs to other posts. I think there were five post in India: four consulates and the Embassy. Getting a chance to go to another post for a couple of weeks and see what's going on there, I think, was very good. Getting to dabble in social media outreach was likewise a good professional growth experience. Again, for entry-level professionals, for our mid-level professionals and then also for local staff we had some great opportunities and that was such a positive thing to see. It was great to see officers having a good, growth experience. As you probably know, sometimes consular tours for first- or second-tour officers are in what are called “visa mills,” high-volume visa posts. For many new Foreign Service officers, those tours can be viewed as drudgery. So the mid-level officers and I, with the blessing of the consul general, tried to do everything we could to make work as professionally fulfilling as possible for our newest colleagues.

Q: Also given the location, did you have ship visits?

MANRING: We had probably one ship visit a year. In fact, the one time that I went out to the Andaman Islands was because we had a U.S. Navy ship visit out there. The consul general was unable to go, so she asked if I would be her representative. India's relationship with the U.S. military is almost at arm's length. On the one hand, I think because of China, they are interested in having friendly relations with other large-power militaries, particularly the U.S., not so much the Russians. But they don't want to be too close to us. So, military cooperation seems to be limited. There was I think a naval military exercise, a joint exercise, which might have been called Operation Malabar or Exercise Malabar, something like that. I think, every two years it would be off one of the coasts of India, and the other year it would take place maybe in the Pacific with part of a U.S. fleet. That exercise would trigger our occasional U.S. Navy ship visits.

One other thing that I would mention and which I found interesting to observe, was the national and state government structure in India. The state governments are almost quasi-autonomous. Because of that, they don't always adhere to the commands and regulations coming out of the national government in New Delhi. We found, for example, with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, state governments generally were not aware of it, and, or even if they were aware of it, they felt that was something that the national government had to take care of, and it didn't apply to them. Where we've run into problems with this was on prisoner visits. When an American would be arrested, under the Convention we're to have access to the arrested American relatively soon following the arrest. I can't remember, offhand if it was within 24 or 48 hours, or whether the Convention just says soon or timely. In the state of Tamil Nadu in particular, that would not happen. Even if we tried to get somebody from the national government to put some pressure on the state government, state government just felt that this was their domain, this was their turf, they were going to run things the way they wanted to. We had one long-term prisoner in Chennai and it took us a long time of repeated effort at both the state and local levels before we could get regular access to him. I think by the time I left, we were seeing him monthly, but it may be took six to nine months to get that far. From a consular perspective., that was a good, solid issue to work on. I have not run into that in my other postings. It's certainly a good challenge for one's diplomatic skills, trying to convince unwilling or disinterested state government officials as to why we should have access to our prisoners.

Q: Okay. Did you have in your consular district a big problem with human trafficking?

MANRING: No, internationally, that was not an issue that involved Americans. There may well have been internal trafficking of humans in India and there may have been some international trafficking, but that was not an issue that we followed in any kind of detail. Perhaps, the POL/ECON section may have paid some attention to that, but it wasn't one of the main things on our radar screen at that time.

Q: Now, how about your family adaptation and education, was your wife able also to get work?

MANRING: At this posting it was my wife and I, and she did get a part-time job at the consulate in the General Services Office (GSO), in the housing unit, and worked - I think - maybe a couple of the three years that we were there. She really enjoyed it, and that gave her something to do. To work on the local economy was really difficult, especially getting the required work permits. English was fairly widely spoken, particularly in office settings, so language was not a barrier as it could be in other postings. My wife and I also did a lot of traveling. I mean, sometimes she would come with me when I would do my work outreach sessions, and if I was going to be speaking on a Monday, we could go someplace for the weekend and then I'd show up for my work outreach on Monday. We really enjoyed getting out and seeing South India. It's just very hot, it could be either very humid or very dry, depending on where you were, but you know, we enjoyed looking into a very different culture. There were hundreds-years-old temples, beautiful architecture, great but very spicy food, and any number of interesting things to see and experience.

Q: Did you go through a national election while you were there?

MANRING: We did. We went through the election where the current Prime Minister Modi was elected for the first time.

Q: Did we take part as election observers?

MANRING: In South India we did not. I don't know that we did any place else in the country or not, but not in South India.

Q: In the State Department, over time LGBT officers have become more visible and then, of course, issues with the local population have to be addressed. Did that become anything of concern while you were there?

MANRING: Well, it wasn't a concern per se, but that was certainly one of the themes that we would underscore in some of our outreach. We would discuss and explain the U.S. view on equality, fairness for all members of the population, inclusion of all parts of the population, etc. Certainly in India these were topics to underscore because I think in many ways, particularly in a more conservative area such as South India, it wasn't being discussed or heard from other, local sources.

Q: Similarly within the consulate, were there tensions between different ethnic groups or different religious groups?

MANRING: Nothing that we as management were aware of. We had, of course, Hindu employees, we had Muslim employees, and we had Christian employees and no issues that steeped into the workplace, thankfully.

Q: Over the three years you were there, did the nature of the consular work change? In other words, did the majority of people going to the U.S. go into different categories or were the trends changing?

MANRING: I wouldn't say that there were significant changes. There was an increase in visa demand while I was there, but it was in the same category: work visas (Hs and Ls). Certainly with the consolidation of blanket L-visas in Chennai, the officers were adjudicating a lot more L-visas than before 2011. In fact, they were the only ones adjudicating blanket L-visas in the country. Student visa numbers increased as well. There was a really strong interest in getting a university education in the U.S. The Indian economy was growing in double-digit percentages while we were there, and that meant more people could afford to be sending children overseas to universities. Generally it would be for a master's degree, but there was a certain percentage of young Indians who went abroad for their undergraduate degrees as well.

Q: You had mentioned the fraud unit, but I just wonder were there any major fraud activities you had to deal with?

MANRING: The anti-fraud unit at the consulate was very active. There was always stuff going on with fake documents, whether it was fake school records to make someone appear to be much better student than she or he was, or other fake documents. You could buy almost any kind of document on the streets in India. They're very good at replicating anything. [Laughter] I often joked with my staff that I didn't have to worry about losing my Rhode Island birth certificate while I was in India because if I did, I could very easily go out on the street and buy a new one. In short, there wasn't anything that was particularly outstanding but there certainly was fraud.

There were some concerns on the domestic U.S. side of what happened to students at some so-called universities. These were accredited universities, but they were not traditional institutions, they were for-profit institutions. The Department of Homeland Security would from time to time do campus searches, investigations, and make recommendations that would help us in terms of screening of visa applicants involving these universities.

There were also some concerns about abuse of some of the white collar worker visas (Hs and Ls) by large companies that would contract with U.S. companies to provide them, you know, a hundred computer script writers for a given period of time, for example. The issue was whether that was the right use for these visas. That issue triggered discussions in the U.S.: policy debates among the Department of Homeland Security, members of Congress, and Congressional staffers. We would stay out of those actual debates, but if there was a change or fine tuning of anything in terms of what we needed to be screening for, then certainly that would come our way.

An example of this type of policy or legal interpretation debate had to do with student visas. I think there was language in either the statute or State Department regulations that the applicant for the student visa had to have the intention of returning to his or her home country. What was then the norm for Indian students, however, was to go to the U.S. for a master's degree in something IT-related and then get a job in the U.S., a job that was specifically for foreign nationals. They could either come back to India and apply for the work visa, or change visa status while in the U.S. When asked during the visa interview

what they intended to do once they completed their degree, many – perhaps most – said they wanted to find a related job in the U.S. The situation was, then, that these students weren't really intending to return to their home country at the end of their studies. What is their intention? Is their intention to go study in the States and then get a job in the States or was their intention to go to the U.S. and study and then come home. There was some discussion within Mission India and back and forth with the State Department, and the State Department's Visa Office instructed us that as long as in the long-run, the student visa applicant intended to return to India, that was fine. Whether they went for a year or two at a university and then three, four, or five years' work experience, that was fine, so long as they could say at the time they applied for their initial student visa that their long-term intention was to return to India. That was the sort of issue that would pop up periodically and it was helpful to the interviewing officers to get some clarification. We would fine tune our adjudication and interviews accordingly.

Q: Now, while you were there, did you find the need to learn any of the local languages or did you try to learn any local language?

MANRING: Great question. Most of the people with whom we had contact spoke some degree of English, the Indian dialect of English, but no matter, it was English. For some of our outreach trips and certainly for our prison trips, one needed to know Tamil for the state of Tamil Nadu, Kannada for the state of Karnataka, or Malayalam for the state of Kerala. Whenever I went on a prison visit, I always had local staff along to translate. Also, for personal traveling in Chennai, most signs are in both English and Tamil, but once you get out of a large metropolitan area, the English drops off pretty quickly. The consulate had a post language program and I encouraged officers to take it if they were interested. Some officers came with FSI Tamil training, but most of them did not.

I took Tamil training at Post for the full three years I was there, primarily, honestly speaking, to be an example to the officers. We had a conference room inside the consular section and that's where the classes were held. I wanted the officers to see, hey, the boss is taking Tamil, so it must be okay for me to take an hour off twice a week to do that as well. Tamil is a very hard language. I think the alphabet is, I don't remember now, towards 300 letters and it uses a totally different script. It's not an easy thing to master. I was able to get up to some very simple conversation levels. I could go to the market and negotiate a price on something. I could go into a store and ask, you know, where are the T-shirts? Or, you know, I could do some fairly simple things like that, I could ask directions, but I never got to the point of actually being able to hold an intellectual conversation in Tamil. I will say for me, however, it was great fun. I enjoyed learning about another language, learning about another alphabet, and I hope I was a good role model for the other officers.

Q: So then were there other events or major initiatives either for you as the head of the consular section or as the deputy consul general that stand out in your mind?

MANRING: Well, one thing that was ongoing the whole time I was there was trying to figure out what to do for our presence in Bangalore (also called Bengaluru). The

Commerce Department had a small office there, but the USG had no other brick-and-mortar presence. Earlier in the 2000s, maybe around 2008 or 2009, the U.S. looked at creating another consulate in South India and the choice boiled down to two cities, Hyderabad and Bangalore. Hyderabad was selected. So that consulate was getting off the ground within a temporary building during my entire tour in Chennai. That still left: what do we do with Bangalore? There was a sizeable U.S. private sector and U.S. citizen presence; and other countries, France, UK, Russia, for example, had consulates there. There was a real demand for it. We had a lot of American citizens out there, as well as a lot of visa applicants. And the Commerce department representatives felt that they could be doing more there with a larger physical presence.

There was a lot of work to look at options, teams would come down from the Embassy or come out from Washington, but it really boiled down to where's the money going to come from? At one point, Ambassador Nancy Powell was hoping that the Bureau of Consular Affairs would fund it as they were then doing for some new consulates in Brazil. But the math on the number of visa applicants just didn't pan out to make it worth the Bureau of Consular Affairs' investment, so to speak. These applicants from Bangalore were constantly coming to Chennai. We could handle their workload from Chennai, so there wasn't the same demand that I think they had in Brazil. This question of whether and how to expand our presence in Bangalore was an aspect of the Chennai work that was constant the whole time I was there. I don't know what the U.S. presence in Bangalore, Bengaluru, is today. I don't know if it's changed any or whether it's still only the Department of Commerce.

While I was in Chennai, I was also able do some research on the consulate's history. I did this while I was back in Washington, DC for training or one summer when I was on a promotion panel. I used the National Archives records, where I found what I considered a relatively large trove of material. The records through the 1800s included a lot of repatriations of U.S. sailors who either missed their sailings or were put ashore for medical treatment. In the early years of the twentieth century, there was an uptick in commercial reporting, such as one on the outlook for selling U.S.-made automobiles in south India. I provided my research to the consul general for her to use excerpts in her public speaking, and I wrote another article for State Magazine on the parallels between consular work in south India now and then.

Q: So now at this point, you are in a stretch assignment into the Senior Foreign Service as an O-1. Did you get promoted to the Senior Foreign Service?

MANRING: I didn't. Technically to go from the non-Senior Foreign Service to Senior Foreign Service you do what's called "opening your window," which is an HR way of saying "I've met all the qualifications, I'm ready to be looked at for promotion." I did not open my window, while I was in Chennai for a couple of reasons. One is I wanted to wait a full three years from my promotion from O-2 to O-1. I had just been promoted from O-2 to O-1 in 2010. So, first I was waiting for that, and second, I had to be in a hardship posting for a certain number of years or months, and that didn't happen until midway through my last year in Chennai. That's why it wasn't until after I left Chennai that I

opened my window or as I was leaving Chennai, I opened my window. I wasn't promoted while I was there, but I was promoted the same year I opened my window, which was 2014, while in my next assignment after Chennai.

Q: Okay, so let's look at that. As you're approaching the end of the time you were in Chennai, what were you thinking about? Where were you thinking about going next?

MANRING: I had not yet participated in the State Department's Senior Training Program, and as an 0-1 officer, I was eligible to do that. That was really the focus of my bidding going back to Washington DC to do one of the senior training programs that they had there. Honestly, it didn't matter to me, really, which one, I just thought any of the senior training programs would be a good opportunity in Washington. In the midst of this process, the assignments office reached out to me and said, "Yep, looking good for Washington assignment for senior training, but, by the way, we do have one senior training position at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, and if you're interested in that, we would give you the assignment." I honestly wasn't interested in that at first, but my wife and I sat down and talked, and particularly with all of our kids being in Washington state, Hawaii seemed sort of pretty close, conceptually, to Washington state. We thought that that would be a good change after a really difficult, intense tour in Chennai. So I ended up saying yes to the East-West Center assignment in Honolulu and was there from August, 2014 to May of 2015. It's an assignment for one academic year.

Q: I'm sorry, one last question about Chennai. You mentioned that it only became a hardship assignment halfway through your tour?

MANRING: No, I met the hardship qualifications for Senior Foreign Service only halfway through the last year of my tour. It did change from a three year assignment to a two year assignment, I think, towards the end of my second year there. I don't remember whether the percentage of hardship changed or it was just a recognition that because of that level of hardship, it really should be a two year assignment rather than a three year assignment. The officers who were assigned there then had the opportunity to cut back a year or stay at a full three year assignment. The consul general and I stayed at three years and I think one other officer did as well. Everybody else changed to two years. Of course, for entry-level officers it was still a two year assignment regardless. But for mid-levels it was a three year assignment.

Q: What was the hardship percentage and what was it based on?

MANRING: I'm trying to remember. For some reason I'm thinking it was 15 percent. And I think based on a number of things: the difficulty to get the local employment for spouses, for example, the heat, the humidity, the lack of American goods and services, healthcare, the security climate, which was generally good, but everybody knew it could change on a dime. I'm sure there were other factors as well, but those are the ones that come to mind.

Q: Okay. Then let's go ahead and follow you over to Honolulu. I imagine you took home leave and then went to Hawaii.

MANRING: I don't remember what the rules are for home leave when you're coming back to the U.S. for on assignment. I know I was in Washington, DC for maybe consultations and I know I took some leave, but anyway, yes, there was some leave that summer and then I ended up in August in Honolulu. So, of course we have no official housing in Honolulu. Instead, we had local quarters allowance, and we had to find our own place to live. I think you're allowed so many days in a hotel that the Department will pay for, maybe 30 days, and then after that you're on your own with this allowance. So we had to do that, again, it was my wife and I, so we didn't have to worry about schooling. We ended up with a small apartment on the 12th floor of a high-rise, about four blocks off of Waikiki Beach, and a block or two from a bus stop for my commute.

The East-West Center is a public diplomacy institution affiliated with and partially funded by the State Department. It is also funded by the state of Hawaii. It began around 1962 and incidentally it was where President Obama's mother was working when she met President Obama's father, who was a foreign exchange student at the University of Hawaii. The East-West Center is located right on a corner of the University of Hawaii, Manoa campus in Honolulu. So it has a lot of synergy going on with the university.

The program I was in is what's called unstructured training, meaning essentially I was sent there and was on my own for one academic year. There were no requirements from the State Department. The East-West Center had a requirement that I give a presentation at a brown bag lunch at some point during the year on any topic that I wanted to talk about. That was it; everything else was whatever I wanted to make of it. There is a Department of Defense training school in Honolulu where I could take classes as well. The East-West Center has a lot of programs, a lot of visiting speakers coming in on all kinds of topics, from political to social, to cultural. Plus, there's the University of Hawaii right there. Because of my age, I was 60, I was eligible to audit classes at no cost at the university. I started off thinking this would be a good opportunity to refresh my foreign language skills on my two principle foreign languages: German and Spanish. Although I didn’t know what my next assignment would be, I felt it was good to keep my foreign languages updated. I thought, okay, I’d be in Honolulu for two semesters at the University of Hawaii and the first semester I could take German classes, then the second semester I would take Spanish classes. I signed up for some upper division German classes and then during that first semester, was assigned to Wiesbaden, Germany, so I continued taking upper-division German classes through the second semester and did not end up taking any Spanish classes.

I was doing language classes as well as some work at the East-West Center. For example, as new, primarily ambassadors, occasionally deputy chiefs of mission would be transiting to their East Asia/Pacific destinations, they would often come through Honolulu for consultations with the military. Honolulu is the location of the headquarters of the Pacific Command - now the Indo-Pacific Command - for the military. I would work with the State Department Political Advisors at that military headquarters as well as desk officers

back in Washington to get the new ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission to come by the East-West Center for some kind of a meeting with subject matter experts there. I think that was a tremendous use of the Center's expertise to help State Department leaders in the region learn more about their countries of assignment as well as regional issues.

[The remaining text was added by Nicholas Manring after the taped interview to cover his final Foreign Service tour.]

Hawaii was a tremendous opportunity to improve my German and for my wife and I to recharge our batteries, so to speak after three intense years in India. While I was in Honolulu, I was promoted into the Senior Foreign Service on my first review, and I received an onward assignment for three years to Wiesbaden, Germany as the political advisor to the commanding general of the U.S. Army in Europe.

In the summer of 2015, then, we moved from Honolulu to Germany, found a beautiful, modern apartment two blocks from the city's main park (Kurpark), and I worked at the U.S. Army Europe headquarters just outside of Wiesbaden. Bea did some volunteer work with Middle Eastern refugees. Because I would turn 65, State's mandatory retirement age for Foreign Service officers, at the end of this tour (in 2018), we knew this would be my last assignment before retiring. Being in Germany gave us a chance to spend time with Bea's siblings and cousins, and for her to spend time with friends she had not seen in a number of years.

For my job, I was the only State Department officer at the U.S. Army Europe headquarters, so I was immersed in a very different culture. For the first two-and-one-half years, I worked for Lt. General Ben Hodges, who was nicknamed the "Energizer Bunny" of the U.S. generals in Europe because he was incredibly active. His focus was on reacting to recent Russian aggression in Ukraine. That included a training program for the Ukrainian army at the Yavoriv base near Lviv, Ukraine; enhancing the preparedness of the U.S. Army Europe should Russia take military action against any U.S. allies in Europe; and encouraging our military allies and partners in Europe to do the same. In support of these activities, Lt. General Hodges traveled extensively – mostly in Europe, but occasionally back to Washington, DC.

Because of my having had a tour in the State Department's Bureau of Legislative Affairs, Lt. General Hodges tacked on to my political advisor duties being the head of his small legislative affairs office. That in and of itself was a very active unit, preparing him and his top generals for briefings in Washington with members of Congress and their staffers, and planning members' and staffers' visits to Army facilities in Europe. From 2015 on, there was strong Congressional interest in reacting to Russian aggression, including billions of dollars in funding for U.S. military exercises and increased military training programs across Europe. Thankfully, our legislative affairs office was well run by two full-time Army civilians and a steady flow of interns. In 2017, I believe, the office interacted with just over 50 Congressional (member and staff) visits to Europe.

On the political advisor front, Lt. General Hodges wanted me with him on most of his trips – which was generally four to six days a week. My role was not only to advise on the political situation in each country he visited, but also to link him with our ambassadors in those countries and to ensure his visit was 100% in sync with what those ambassadors wanted.

For my last seven months in this assignment, I worked for Lt. General Hodges' successor, Lt. General Chris Cavoli. This was his first assignment as a Lt. General, and he traveled considerably less than Lt. General Hodges and when he did travel, it was primarily to U.S. Army facilities and not to capitals for advocacy.

This tour gave me a unique opportunity to travel extensively throughout Europe and to develop relationships with all of our ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission in the region, a very unusual opportunity for a Foreign Service officer. We traveled from Italy to Finland to Estonia to Gibraltar to Moldova; and often to Poland, Ukraine, and Berlin. Travel was primarily by a small, six- or seven- military jet, It was also an education on the role of the very well-funded U.S. military in U.S. foreign policy. Having U.S. military do joint training or a joint exercise in a country gave our ambassador there something tangible to demonstrate the U.S.' ties and commitment to that country. That kind of tangible activity is generally beyond the funding ability of the State Department.

Towards the end of this assignment, at the encouragement of a more senior political advisor who was also in my chain of command, Ambassador Susan Elliott, I threw my hat in the ring for a couple of ambassadorships. If an officer is nominated and the nomination is sent from the State Department to the White House, the mandatory retirement at age 65 rule is not enforced, so one can keep on working after turning 65, through the Senate confirmation process and while serving as ambassador. In my case, in Washington, two regional bureaus short-listed me for ambassadorships in Palau and Turkmenistan. I wasn't selected by the Department-wide panel, so neither potential nomination went any further and I stayed on course for my November 2018 retirement.

In November 2018, when I turned 65, my wife and I retired to Seattle, Washington to a house we had bought there a few years earlier.

End of interview