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

CAROL MATHIA

Interviewed by: Robin Matthewman
Initial interview date: June 15, 2021

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[Mrs. Mathia accompanied her spouse, Robert P. Mathia, on his USAID assignments in Washington, DC and abroad.]

INTERVIEW

Q: Good afternoon, it's June 15, 2021 and we are in the oral history interview with Carol Mathia. This is Robin Matthewman. So, Carol, welcome.

MATHIA: Thank you.

Q: Why don't we start at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

MATHIA: I was born in Mishawaka, Indiana on August 10, 1948.

Q: Okay, and tell me about your parents' backgrounds—so they were an immigrant family—

MATHIA: No, my father's parents were immigrants. They first settled in Kentucky, and later on they moved up to Indiana.

Q: And the name was Mathia?

MATHIA: No, Mathia is my married name.

Q: Oh, okay.

MATHIA: Right. But this was my father, Paul Wagner.

Q: Paul Wagner.

MATHIA: His relatives moved from Kentucky up to Indiana where they had a dairy farm and chickens. My mother's father was from Belgium. He came over at the age of eighteen. His wife was born in the United States. My mother met my dad through a company where they both worked, Dodge Manufacturing Corporation. They make power transmission parts. My mother had been attending high school. She was a good student but since they were a poor family, she was made to go to work right after school. Because of this, she would always ask for eighth period study hall. Then she would ask to get out of study hall, so she could get to her job sooner. She would walk from school to her job where she did house cleaning and taking care of children. She never had time to do homework because of that. During her sophomore year, she failed, I think, her biology class, and her parents said, If you can't keep up in school you have to quit and get a full-time job.

Q: Oh, no.

MATHIA: She got a job as a secretary at Dodge. That's where she met my father and they ended up getting married.

Q: What'd your father do?

MATHIA: He worked in the factory in the shipping department, shipping out the products that they made to different places. My mother worked in the office that was in the middle of the shipping area. The workers would have to come into the office, so my dad met my mother there.

Q: And his father had been—oh no that was your mom. Her father had been from Belgium, so did they speak—

MATHIA: Right, my mother's father was from Belgium.

Q: Did they speak French or anything at home?

MATHIA: No, my grandpa was from the Flemish speaking section of Belgium. My grandmother was second generation and only spoke English. I don't think grandpa ever spoke to them in anything but English, but it was very broken English. Like I said in my book, he was the first person that I met that I could tell English was his second language because he spoke it in a very broken way.

Q: Aha, aha.

MATHIA: He never drove. I don't know why he didn't, but my grandma always did the driving. He was in World War II, and when he came back, he wasn't yet a citizen. They weren't going to give him citizenship, and he said, "I fought for this country, you need to give me citizenship." So, he got his citizenship.

Q: Good for him.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: Back when there was somebody to talk to.

MATHIA: Right, right.

Q: So how old was your mom when they got married?

MATHIA: My mother was nineteen. In fact, it was on her nineteenth birthday, and my dad was twenty-four because he was five years older.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: My mother kept working until she had my brother. They got married in 1946, and in 1947 my brother was born and she stopped working. Then in 1948 my twin sister and I were born. We always jokingly say that she was twenty when she had us, so she had three children before she could even vote because back then twenty-one was the voting age.

Q: But your father did not go to the war?

MATHIA: My father was in the war, yes.

Q: Oh, okay.

MATHIA: So, I'm thinking, then maybe my grandfather was in World War I.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: It would have to be.

Q: And, your dad, was he stationed overseas, was he in the war fighting?

MATHIA: Yes, yes. He never talked much about it, but he was in the air force. I don't know if it was called the air force then. I think that they didn't have a separate air force yet. I think he loaded things onto the planes. I always thought that he, from what little he said, because he never really talked about it, that he was somebody that was in the plane helping drop the bombs. But just a year or so ago my younger sister said something to the effect that he just loaded items into the plane. So, I don't know, I don't know which one he did.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: I'd like to find out.

Q: And do you know if he was in the Atlantic? If he was in Europe or Asia?

MATHIA: I believe he was in Europe. I think he was in Germany, but I'm not positive.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: I don't know.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: What was unusual was when he got Alzheimer's towards the end of his life. One time we came home to Indiana for Christmas. The girls—my girls were probably three and five at the time, and his Alzheimer's was pretty bad. He had never ever talked about the war, but this time when I came home, he was sitting on the couch with me, and he got out these books that he had that were, I guess, memories of the war. I don't know who published them or anything, but he would sit there with me and point to different men in the book and would say, "He was my friend, he was my friend, he was my friend." That's the only time he ever talked about the war with me. Unfortunately, I didn't think to ask him exactly what he did. I probably should've but I think I was just in shock that he actually was talking about it.

Q: How interesting. So, your parents got married and how many children did they have?

MATHIA: Seven.

Q: Seven.

MATHIA: Seven all together.

Q: And you're a twin.

MATHIA: Right.

Q: And were there other twins in the family?

MATHIA: No. There was my older brother, then my twin sister and me, and then three years later another sister, and then after Nancy came Tom. He was a little bit later because my mother had a miscarriage in between Nancy and Tom. After Tom came Frances. Two-and-a-half years after that, Annette. Annette had a lot of medical problems. She passed away when she was fifteen.

Q: So that must have had a big effect on the family?

MATHIA: Yes. We were living in Reston, Virginia at the time. Bob was stationed in DC When she passed away, my mother allowed them to do an autopsy of her.
They let her see the autopsy, but they would not give a copy to her. My mother was not very formally educated. She earned her Graduate Equivalency Diploma [GED] in 1970, the same year Karen and I graduated college with our bachelor's degrees. I don't think she knew enough to ask for a copy. I don't think she knew her legal rights. Annette had something called Hypoplastic Anemia. She also developed Kearns-Sayre syndrome. Kearns-Sayre syndrome causes your eyelids to droop. It got so bad that eventually a doctor had to perform surgery by cutting away some of her eyelids, so she could see. Then when she slept her eyelids would not completely close. She had to have a pacemaker when she was thirteen. When they put in the pacemaker, the doctors said her organs looked like an old person's. They predicted that she would only live for about two more years because her organs looked so aged. She did pass away two years later. My mother said that when they talked to her about the autopsy they kept asking, When Annette was born and in the nursery were there any chemical spills? My mother told them she did not know. I'm thinking that possibly they think there was a chemical spill and Annette inhaled something and that maybe ended up giving her some of the problems that she had.

Q: Wow.

MATHIA: But we never pursued it.

Q: Right, right. I'm sorry, that must have been quite a tragedy. So, you were born in 1948. And tell me about the town that you grew up in.

MATHIA: It was a small town, only about thirty thousand or so people. It had only one high school at the time. I went to a Catholic school for elementary, first through eighth grade. In kindergarten I went to the public school because there was no kindergarten at the Catholic school. The reason we were able to go to a Catholic school, even though we were poor, was that there were four Catholic schools in Mishawaka, and the one that was in our area had the philosophy that every child deserved a Catholic education, so they didn't charge any tuition, and we were able to go.

Q: And your family was Catholic on both sides?

MATHIA: Well, no my father wasn't. He had to convert so that they could get married in the church.

Q: Ah.

MATHIA: He didn't practice Catholicism. He never went to church with us. I remember that almost every one of us children were taught in our Catholic school catechism class that it was a mortal sin to miss church on Sunday, a holy day of obligation. We were taught that if you had an unforgiven mortal sin when you died, you would go to hell. Almost every one of us went through a period where on Sunday when we were getting ready to go to church, we'd beg our dad to go to church with us. We didn't want him to die and go to hell. We believed it back then, and we were very upset that he wouldn't go with us.

Q: You had a house that you grew up in?

MATHIA: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: In fact, it was built by my father and my grandfather. When my parents were first married, they lived with my great-grandfather on my father's side. Then my father and grandfather built our house in Mishawaka. When the house was finally built, my mother said that she couldn't be carried across the threshold because she was pregnant with Karen and me. So, I said, "Then I guess we got carried across the threshold."

Q: So, you liked growing up as a twin, right?

MATHIA: Yes, I enjoyed it. In fact, people would always say, Well what's it like being a twin? And I would say I did not know how to compare it because I hadn't ever been a singleton so I didn't know.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: Yes, I enjoyed being a twin. We were alike in many ways but different in many ways too. In first grade the elementary school that we went to had two of every grade. They put A-M in one grade and N-Z in the other, so Karen and I were in the same class in first grade. She would get up and walk around the room sometimes, and I would tell her, "Get back in your seat, you're not supposed to get up. Get back in your seat."

One time after recess she realized that she didn't have the belt to her dress because she had taken it off to use to play with some of her classmates. She went up to the nun and said, "I need to go find my belt that I left on the playground." The nun got really upset with her because she was going to have to leave the room after just getting back from recess. The nun then said to me, "You're her twin so you go out and help her find it too." Then another time, this was in first grade, she went up to the nun after we had just had our bathroom break. She hadn't gone at the assigned time but had to go. She went up to the nun and said, "I need to go to the bathroom." The nun angrily said, "Well, why didn't you go with the rest of the class when you were supposed to?" This frightened Karen, and she wet her pants right there in front of the classroom. The nun got really upset with her, berating her in front of everyone. It was so bad that I started to cry because she was embarrassing her and yelling at her. I became hysterical, and I started crying. The school called my aunt to come take my sister home. They made her take me home too because I was so upset. Finally, they decided that for second grade they would separate us.

Q: So that you could—

MATHIA: They thought that Karen was too dependent on me.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: And then—

MATHIA: I was really happy because she got to stay in our old class that had all the same classmates, and I got to go to the new class. Therefore, I knew all the people from the new class and those from the old class. I felt really cool because I knew everyone.

Q: And was it a small enough town that you could walk to school?

MATHIA: Yes, we walked to school.

Q: Okay. Alright. And did you like school? Did you like reading? Did you like math?

MATHIA: Yes, my sister and I both, we loved school. Being from such a big family, it was hard to get individual attention. My mother wasn't educated enough to know she

should read to us. She did teach us how to play hopscotch and board games, but she just didn't know that much about how to help us along academically. In school the nuns favored the kids that were smart. We figured that out early on. We knew that if we did what we should and did well, we'd get praised. I liked getting that praise, so I did well in school because of that. I liked learning too, but the praise from the nuns was the initial reason I did well.

Q: And, so did you start—I think I saw something that you studied Spanish in school—was that in high school or did they have—

MATHIA: That was in high school.

Q: Okay. And sports, was that in high school too?

MATHIA: In grade school, we had the opportunity to be on the school's volleyball team. There were four Catholic grade schools. Each had a girls' volleyball team. We would play each other throughout the volleyball season. In high school, they hadn't yet passed Title IX, so the only way we could do sports was through the Girls Athletic Association, GAA, and so we participated. One time we had a volleyball tourney that we got to go to. And then in the summertime the parks had volleyball for the girls. In the morning in the summer, we had a list of chores taped to our bedroom door. Our mother had written different chores we had to do, such as make our bed, before we could go to the park and play. We'd come home for lunch, and then after lunch we'd go back again to the park. We would practice volleyball, and in the afternoons we would go to different parks and play against each other for tourneys. We got our athletics that way.

Q: Okay. So, when you went to high school, what year was that?

MATHIA: From '62 to '66.

Q: Okay. So—

MATHIA: Title IX was passed in 1972. Once I taught high school in the States in the '90s, I would remind my female students to appreciate the fact that high school sports were open to them as I had not had that privilege when I went to high school.

Q: So, in the '60s we're talking about John F. Kennedy being assassinated and just starting—

MATHIA: I was a sophomore when that happened, yes.

Q: And Vietnam just starting, right? So, were any of the boys in your—was the draft and Vietnam on anybody's mind?

MATHIA: My sister and I didn't really date in high school, so I don't really know what—

Q: A boy's thoughts about—

MATHIA: —the boys were thinking about.

Q: But your—

MATHIA: In college I can remember walking to class at Indiana University [IU]. I had to go to Ballentine Hall, which was the tallest building on campus. There were all these Vietnam War protesters sitting around the building. I didn't approve of the war, but I also was on scholarship so I couldn't afford to skip class and protest. One day I was crossing the protesters to enter Ballentine, and my purse accidentally hit one of them. I was frightened. I said, "Oh, I'm so sorry I didn't do that on purpose—" I was really upset, and apologetic, and nothing happened.

Q: And your older brother? Was he caught up at all?

MATHIA: Yes, he went to Vietnam.

Q: Oh, he did?

MATHIA: Yes, but he didn't have to see combat. He was in, I think, radio communications. He would go up and fix radio towers. He told us that he had heard gunfire while he was up on the tower, but he was never in actual combat.

Q: But he was in Vietnam itself?

MATHIA: Yes, he was in Vietnam.

Q: For a couple of years?

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: And then you had younger brothers.

MATHIA: I had my older brother that went to Vietnam and then just one younger brother, ten years younger than my older brother, so he had no experience with Vietnam. We were five girls and two boys.

Q: Okay. So, the outer world was—when you were in high school—was sort of just your—

MATHIA: Foreign to me. Yes, I never would've thought I would someday become a Foreign Service wife because I was just in my small little world back then.

Q: Okay. Very good. And relatively happy.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: So, it sounds like you also were very diligent and you very much valued education.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: And it must have been a lot of work to get scholarships.

MATHIA: I don't know if it was a lot of work because we just enjoyed doing well in school. I think we got the scholarships because there were guidance counselors that realized that we had potential and looked out for us. Before we knew we were going to get scholarships Karen and I announced to our dad that we were going to go to college. My brother already was a freshman at Purdue University when we said that we were going, and he said, "Girls don't go to college, I'm not paying for you guys to go to college." We both said, "Well, we're going to go and you don't have to give us any money, we'll find a way." We had originally thought that after high school, we would get jobs as secretaries to earn and save enough money for college. Then scholarships came without our even applying for them. We were lucky that we were in the right place at the right time because it was easy to get a scholarship, especially when the guidance counselors were looking out for us. Also, school was not nearly as expensive as it is now.

Q: That's right. When they started the student loan program, I'm about nine years younger than you, so— And I had some family help but they had work study and the loans didn't seem so expensive compared to, you know—

MATHIA: Right.

Q: —what loans were for other things, so. It was a different time. I hope we get back to that.

MATHIA: I know, yes. I agree.

Q: For the kids. So, you and your sister went to different colleges?

MATHIA: My freshman year I went to Purdue University in Lafayette, and she went to Indiana University, in Bloomington, both in Indiana. I was going to be a math major. In high school, I took just two years of algebra and one of geometry. I really liked math. The math teacher I had, I think, was very impressed because I was a female and there weren't very many females in the class. I decided I was going to be a math major. But the summer between my senior year in high school and my freshman year in college, Purdue University sent me a booklet of math problems that I should look at and see if I could do. I did not understand most of the problems in it. I was very naive, and I didn't realize until then that I didn't have enough math to be a math major. I only had three years of math in

high school. No pre-calc, nothing like that that I know about now, and so I thought, Well, I can't be a math major.

When I got to university, I changed to Spanish because I always liked Spanish, and I thought, I can do that, I can be a Spanish teacher, so I'll do that. Because of this change in majors, they changed the math course that I would be taking to an easier math course for my math requirement. But they kept me in a biology class that I think was for math majors—or maybe people studying pre-med. I didn't understand what was going on. The professor would say, "If you're having a hard time go to the library and read these books to help you." I did go and read them, and I still couldn't understand. I thought, I don't know, I don't have the background, I cannot do this. And being a first generation college student, I didn't know anything about dropping a course. Once I found out that you could drop a course, I went through the process, and the form I had had to be signed by the professor whose course I was dropping.

I set up a meeting and went to see the professor. It was humiliating. He just kept grilling me and saying, "Why don't you want to take this class? Are you lazy?" And I said, "No I'm not lazy. I've done all the things you said to do if you're having problems, and I still don't understand this. And I'm on scholarship, and I don't want to lose my scholarship if I fail this course." He did a little more berating, but he finally signed the paper, so that I could drop that class.

Q: He doesn't sound like he knew how to teach it very well.

MATHIA: He may have known how to teach. I really think it was because it was just beyond my level of science.

Q: Background—

MATHIA: In grade school we never had science. At that time, our Catholic school didn't have science, art, or home economics. Those courses weren't offered. High school was when I really had my first science class. I took biology and chemistry. That was it. I just didn't have the background I think for that college biology class. Just like I wouldn't have had the background for the math class that they had originally put me in.

Coming from an elementary Catholic school that was inferior to the public elementary schools in our town put us at some disadvantages. When I took sewing class, I didn't even know how to thread a sewing machine; whereas, the girls from the public schools had already sewed some items like aprons. When I took the first sewing test, we were given a piece of cloth and a pattern that looked like a bell. I followed the instructions and finally realized the test was to sew a sleeve. During the test, I exclaimed, "Oh, this is a sleeve!" The teacher smiled and said, "You must be following the instructions correctly."

Q: Okay. So why did you end up changing universities?

MATHIA: There are three reasons I changed. One: Purdue is an engineering school and it's noted for math and engineering, liberal arts. I thought, If I'm majoring in Spanish, I'd be better off at Indiana University. Second: I also missed my sister, and she was there. Third: one of the requirements at Purdue was to eventually take a speech class, and I've always hated giving speeches. I did not want to take that class, and it wasn't required at Indiana University. Those were my three reasons to transfer, so I did.

Q: Very good. And you missed a little bit of the first year of college when you went on to Indiana. People had made their own friends and—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: But you had your sister.

MATHIA: Right. And I was very lucky because they put me in the same dorm that she was in. I was on the fifth floor, and she was on the sixth floor. We had different scholarships. Her major scholarship was called a resident scholarship. All the people on her floor were resident scholars. They had to be a resident of Indiana to get the scholarship. They earned money by cleaning their rooms themselves and changing the sheets themselves, even cleaning the hallway and the lavatories. Her whole floor was only students from Indiana. It was nice because she already had all those friends, and they were only a floor above me. I got to meet them. Because of that, it wasn't nearly as difficult as it could have been for me to change schools.

Q: So, did people get you mixed up? If you walked by, they might call you her name?

MATHIA: One time my sister was in a dorm elevator. A person there thought she was me. The girl wanted some help with Spanish. My sister was an elementary education major. She had only had two years of Spanish in high school. She told the girl, "You think I'm Carol, but I'm Karen, and I'm her twin, and I can't help you because I don't know Spanish." The girl did not believe her. She thought—

Q: That you were being rude.

MATHIA: Karen just didn't want to help her, and so she was making up this lie.

Q: Aw. So where is the University of Indiana? What town?

MATHIA: Bloomington, Indiana.

Q: Okay. So, what's Bloomington like?

MATHIA: It's a university town. There's a movie called *Hoosiers* that gives you a little bit of an idea what it's like because every year Indiana University has a bicycle race and different dorms have teams that enter the race; also, sororities and fraternities have teams

that enter. I think that there are even some townies that come and race. And so, that—it isn't *Hoosiers*, that's—*Hoosiers* is the one about—

Q: Oh, no, that's the one about the guy—the one about the cycling is Breaking Away.

MATHIA: Yes. I'm thinking—*Hoosiers* is the one about the basketball team, I believe.

Q: Right. We just watched it—we watched it many times in my family, but we just watched it over the holidays last year again and my nephew who teaches—coaches basketball came over with his girlfriend at the end and we're like, Wait, wait we're in the middle, they're just coming and they're going to see this big stadium. Which, when they've come from this little small town and never seen such a big stadium, so that was where we were in the movie when my nephew arrived.

MATHIA: We were living in the Dominican Republic when that movie came out and I was a member of the IU [Indiana University] Alumni Association and they sent me a copy of the tape *Hoosiers*.

Q: That's a lovely movie. It's well-done—about small towns. Your sister was studying education, and you were studying Spanish? And what did you think you were going to do with it? Teach Spanish or—

MATHIA: Yes, I was planning to be a teacher, but I was so naive about college that I didn't even know when I first went that there's more than a bachelor's degree. That you can get a master's and then you can get a doctorate. I had no idea about that. Also, when I decided I wanted to be a teacher, I just went through the School of Arts and Sciences rather than the School of Education. I majored in Spanish with a minor in sociology, and then I realized that I needed to meet special requirements to get a teaching certificate. So, I made sure I got all of those. But I was not in the school of education like most students are who are going into teaching.

Q: Okay. And what do you think, did that give you a different perspective or did you feel like you missed a lot?

MATHIA: The required education courses I had to take at the School of Education, I didn't think much of. There was one called Psych 280, the psychology of education, and we used to call it "Puke" 280 because it wasn't very good. With the School of Arts and Sciences to be a Spanish teacher, you had to take a Spanish linguistics course. It was considered the most difficult course in the curriculum for a Spanish teaching certificate. It was very difficult. I had to work very hard at it, but it was not a requirement in the School of Education. I can remember I had classmates that were taking it, and they knew they weren't going to pass, so they dropped out of the course and switched to the School of Education to avoid the Spanish linguistics class. My younger daughter also went to IU and was a Spanish teaching major. She went through the School of Education, but by then, they also required the Spanish linguistics class.

Q: Did they have native speakers in the Spanish department?

MATHIA: There was—I remember one, Mr. Beltrán was a native speaker. There were also semester guest lecturers. There was one from Spain, Julian Marias, that I took a class with in graduate school.

Q: And sociology, did you like that?

MATHIA: I liked it very much. In fact, I thought at one time I might want to go into social work rather than be a teacher, but then I realized that I probably couldn't hack it mentally because I would get too involved with the people I helped. It's bad enough getting involved as a teacher, so I stayed with teaching.

Q: And in that liberal arts program, then, did you get student teaching experience?

MATHIA: Yes, yes, I did. It was one of the requirements in order to get your teaching certificate. I did mine for half a semester of my senior year. It was different for elementary teachers and secondary teachers. Elementary teachers did a whole semester of student teaching.

I remember going to the auditorium where we were going to receive our teaching assignments. They started out by explaining the program to us. I just naively thought that I would get my teaching assignment to maybe go to Mishawaka High School, so I could live with my parents. After the introduction to the program, they gave us our assignments. I was assigned to a school in southern Indiana. I realized I couldn't student teach there. I did not yet know how to drive. I didn't have a car. And I couldn't afford to rent a place in southern Indiana while I student taught.

I was a nervous wreck until they were done handing out all the assignments. I then hurried up to the stage, and I told them, "You have to give me a teaching assignment in northern Indiana because I can't do this." I explained why, and they changed my assignment to a high school in South Bend [next door to Mishawaka], but it was with a woman that I'm sure was not a certified teacher. I think it's because there weren't any more certified Spanish teachers in Northern Indiana by the time they realized I needed a position there. From my records, they knew that I was a good student, and they made an exception. I think I kind of went under the radar or something to be able to do that.

Q: And was it student teaching in Spanish or general?

MATHIA: It was teaching Spanish, high school Spanish.

Q: Okay. Very good. By this point you hadn't been out of Indiana yet.

MATHIA: No, no. No.

Q: Very good. And did you study Latin America—

MATHIA: No, I had been out of Indiana because my junior year I decided I was going to try out for the Junior Year Abroad program. I thought that way, I would get to see the world, not knowing that I was going to get to see the world in the future anyway. I thought I could see Europe on my school breaks while studying at the University of Madrid. The cost for a school year in Spain was not much more than if I were to stay on campus and take my classes. I thought I'd apply. I did and went through the interview and was accepted, so I spent my junior year in Spain.

Q: Madrid?

MATHIA: In Madrid, yes. The University of Madrid.

Q: So, I've heard mixed reviews on that because sometimes the host families are not that warm and cuddly and other times it's a wonderful experience and they're fast friends for the rest of their lives. Did you have a good one?

MATHIA: I had a good one. My family was a widow with two children still living with her. I was with three other girls in the program. We shared a sitting room and then there was a bedroom on either side of the sitting room. I roomed with another girl from Indiana University. In the other bedroom were two girls from another university. We became pretty good friends during that year, but with the family itself, we weren't that close.

Q: Did you get to travel around Spain?

MATHIA: Yes, and other countries too. My first trip was with a friend I made during the orientation program we had. She and I went to southern Spain. We hitchhiked because back then it was okay to do. It was still kind of iffy, but we didn't have enough money so we hitchhiked.

Q: So this was in the late '60s or early '70s?

MATHIA: This was '68 to '69.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: While I was in Spain, I thought it would be a good idea to meet the relatives of my grandfather that had come from Belgium to the States when he was eighteen. He was one of nine children. When his mother passed away, his father remarried, and he had nine more children with his second wife. That meant my grandfather left a lot of relatives back in Belgium. I wrote to him and said, "I'd like to go to Belgium and meet your relatives." He wrote to them. They were in the Flemish speaking section of Belgium. He wrote to them in Flemish and told them that my friend and I were going to be visiting. In that way

they would know when these people showed up and didn't know any Flemish, they would be his granddaughter and her friend.

Luckily my friend, the girl that I traveled with, had taken German and Flemish is a lot like German. Also, one of the relatives spoke good English, so she did a lot of interpreting for us. We decided to get there by hitchhiking. The first day we hitchhiked all the way up to just across the border into France. The next day we thought, Well we're going to try to get all the way to Paris today. And we were in luck. We found a ride with a man who was going to Paris. The way we let a prospective ride know where we wanted to go since we didn't speak French was rather unrefined. We had a map on which we pointed to where we were and then to where we wanted to go. If they shook their heads, yes, we got in the car. We were very foolish to do the things we did, but, fortunately, we were okay.

On the second day, we were so happy we were going to get to Paris and we were going to make our goal for the day. Then we realized we didn't have our passports. The custom was that when you got into a hotel, you would give in your passports at the front desk. Then when you checked out and paid, you would get your passports back. But that time we forgot to get them back. We were so upset with ourselves. We then had to try to explain to our ride that we had to get out, we had to go back. He finally understood us, so we got out of the car and started trying to hitchhike back. We were able to get a ride from a French businessman. He was returning from a business trip, and he lived in the border town where we had left our passports. He spoke English, so we explained our problem. He took us back to his house. The look on his wife's face when he walked in with two young American girls was priceless. Fortunately, she understood the situation. The hotel where we left our passports was called The Voyagers in French. I guess in this town, there were quite a few hotels called The Voyagers. He called them up until he found the one where two silly American girls had left their passports.

He had his son take us there, and we retrieved our passports. By then it was early afternoon, and we thought, Oh gosh, we've wasted a whole day. We started hitchhiking again. Serendipitously, we got a ride from a man who was Belgian. He spoke English, Flemish, German, and Spanish. We told him what our goal was, and he was able to take us to one of my relatives' doorsteps and introduce us to them in Flemish. I thought, Well, we were supposed to lose our passports.

Q: So, what was the family like?

MATHIA: The Belgian family?

Q: Yes, your grandfather's family?

MATHIA: They were very eager to please us. They understood Mary, my hitchhiking partner's German due to being Flemish. They would ask us how we liked the food and other aspects of Belgium. I asked Mary, "How do you say 'this is very nice' in German?"

She said, "*Sehr schön.*" And so, I would look at something and say, "*Sehr schön.*" Then they would say, "Do you want it?" And I thought, "Better not say that anymore." They would feed us these wonderful meals. Then we would go to another relative's house, and they would feed us wonderful meals. Afterward they would ask, "Do you like my meal better or do you like their meal better?" I thought, What am I supposed to say?

The relative's house at which we stayed had no indoor toilet. The weather was fairly cool, and I remember hating to use the outhouse whenever it was necessary.

The relatives were always trying to please us. They let us ride their bikes around the area. On the weekend they took us to the Netherlands. They took us to a cookie factory where we were gifted with a big box of cookies. One of my relatives was a seamstress whose specialty was wedding dresses. She showed us an album of all the different wedding dresses she'd made. She kept saying, "If you stay long enough, I'll make you an entire outfit." We really would have liked to have done that, but Mary had relatives in Germany that we had said we were going to go visit. We had to leave, so we didn't get to have those outfits made.

Q: Very good. And then where did you go in Germany?

MATHIA: I can't remember the names of the cities we went to. At our first stop we stayed with a woman, probably in her mid-fifties. Mary had an uncle who had married a German woman during World War II. He stayed in Germany after the war. That's why she had relatives there. I think this woman was perhaps the sister of the woman that he had married. We stayed with her for a couple of days, and then from there we went up to Switzerland because she had some relatives there. We took a train from the German place up to Switzerland.

When we got to Switzerland it was night time and dark. We got out of the train and were met by the couple who took us to their home. They showed us around the house and showed us to our bedroom. Then they gave us towels, and I asked Mary, "What did you say to them?" She said, "I told them that we're dirty." They gave us the towels, so we could take a bath that evening. Mary must have impressed them with how dirty we were! We bathed and were very tired from our traveling, so we went directly to bed after bathing. The next morning when we got up, we went down to breakfast. The mother said, "I'd like you to do me a little favor and go to the corner store and get me some items." We did and when we went out the front door, I was amazed. I saw a mountain in front of me. Then I turned to the left with a mountain there. I turned all around and there were mountains everywhere. I didn't realize Switzerland was that lovely. It was a nice shock seeing all those mountains.

They took us to Vevey. They were very tan because they were skiers. They had two young children, a boy and a girl. I don't know if their children went skiing, but you could tell that the parents had been skiing because they were so tan. The husband worked for Nestlé. When you buy products from Nestlé in Switzerland, they come with coupons.

You can save up those coupons and when you get enough you can redeem them for books. The husband worked in the division where they made the books that you would get with the coupons. This was Easter time, and they had Nestlé candy all over the house. They kept telling us, "Eat whatever you want. Eat whatever you want." We had a good time.

Q: Very good. And then you went back to Spain and continued your studies—

MATHIA: Right.

Q: —And I understand that when you go to university in a language you really learn it.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: It really makes a big difference. Did you do some essays and writing and learned how to write in Spanish?

MATHIA: Yes, I think our vocabulary expanded. When we went, we were told we were going to have classes with Spanish students, but this was during the time of Franco and there had been a lot of rioting at the university. In fact, when I was interviewed for the program, one of the things they asked me was, What would you do if you were at the university when rioting was going on and they were shooting at you? And I said, "Well, I'd duck." And they said, That's a good answer.

But when we got to Madrid, they told us the current university situation was bad enough that they didn't want us to have any classes with the Spanish students. Instead, we had all of our classes with other American students in the program. We had the same professors, but we didn't get to be in classes with the Spanish students. Then the rioting at the university increased so much that the program administrators decided our classes would be taken off campus. We had to meet in a business building on the other side of town. We were on the seventh floor of the building. We could take a bus to get to classes, but I usually walked. We were not allowed to use the elevator. We had to climb up the seven flights to get to our classes.

To get to our new "campus" when walking, we passed right through the main shopping center of Madrid. Once my roommate Cheryl and I were walking to campus and were in the center of the shopping district. We were walking right behind two young men. They were speaking in English. From their accents we surmised that one of them was Spanish and the other British. In the late 1960s, *Rowan and Martin's Laugh In* was a popular comedy show that often used the phrase, "Sock it to me, baby." These two young men were discussing how one would say this in Spanish. Idioms are very difficult, if not impossible, to translate, but they finally decided on *Pégame, cariño*. Cheryl and I had a good laugh listening to this important, intellectual conversation.

Q: And 1968–69, they were periods of turmoil in universities around the world I think, right?

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: But you enjoyed your time?

MATHIA: Yes, very much. I got to see a lot of Europe.

Q: And then you mentioned in your stories that while you were in college you were working in the same company that your dad had worked at, Dodge?

MATHIA: Correct, my major scholarship was a Dodge scholarship which entitled me to six hundred dollars per year plus a summer job. The summer job was my major source of income for college. The first three summers that I worked there I worked in the sales department. Then when I came back from Spain, going into my senior year I worked down in the factory where my father was still working. I worked in the office area where my mother was when she met my dad.

Q: And you met your husband there?

MATHIA: No, my mother met my dad there.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: I didn't meet my husband there. The first summer that I worked there I met a young lady who worked in the Sales Department. Her name was Ellen Hartman. She became Ellen Mathia when she married Bob's brother. By the time I got back from Spain, Ellen was engaged to Ron. She took me to his house to meet him. At that time I also met Bob, my future husband, for the first time since he had just come back from Korea. Right after graduation from Indiana University, Bob was drafted. This was during the Vietnam war years. He graduated with a degree in accounting, so the army chose to put him in the Finance Corps to work in Korea. He had just come back from Korea and was planning to go to Indiana State University in Terre Haute that fall to work on a master's in economics. We started dating and ended up getting married. So, I had three things that were good about Dodge. First, I wouldn't have been born if it weren't for Dodge because my parents met each other there. Second, I wouldn't have been able to go to college if it weren't for Dodge because of the scholarship I got from them. And, third, I wouldn't have met my husband if it weren't for Dodge.

Q: So it's a very important company to you.

MATHIA: Right, right. It no longer exists, but it did fine for me.

Q: So how old was Bob when you met him?

MATHIA: I married him when I was twenty-two, so I was probably twenty-one and he was four years older, so he was twenty-five.

Q: He had gone to college and then he had gone to—

MATHIA: Korea.

Q: —Korea, the military, the draft.

MATHIA: Yes, he'd gotten his bachelor's degree and then he was drafted. He had a job in accounting waiting for him in Michigan right after graduation, but he got drafted before he could take it.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: When he got back from Korea, he decided to go to graduate school and get a degree in economics.

Q: Okay. And was he going to school there in the same university?

MATHIA: No, he went to Indiana State University in Terre Haute. I was at Indiana University in Bloomington.

Q: Okay. Alright. But you met him that summer before your senior year?

MATHIA: Right, right.

Q: And then when you got out of school did you end up teaching?

MATHIA: No. Eventually, I would teach. I was studying at Indiana University, and he was at Indiana State. To date each other meant we were going back and forth every weekend from Indiana State to Indiana University or vice versa, so we decided to get married and live on the IU campus where I attended classes. He then commuted to Indiana State, a trip of about an hour and fifteen minutes. He got his degree before I did and started looking for a job. In addition to classes, I worked part time at the Spanish department in Ballentine Hall. It happened to be on the same floor as IU's economics department.

After I was done working one day, I was waiting for the elevator. Next to the elevator was a bulletin board for the economics department. On it was a notice that USAID [United States Agency for International Development] was looking for economists. Since Bob would soon be looking for a job, I tore off one of the notices and took it back to our trailer apartment that was on campus. He filled it out and went through all the processes, the security clearances, and everything else. He was accepted for the Foreign Service, so

he went to DC for his orientation while I was still finishing work on my master's. I stayed back in the trailer where we had been living.

Q: So you got a master's in Spanish or education or—

MATHIA: I got a master's in Spanish. It was called a Master's of Art for Teachers [MAT]. I didn't have to write a thesis but did have to take orals and a written exam. You could also have a minor, so I majored in Spanish with a minor in English as a second language, not realizing how good it would be for me in the future.

Q: So what did you all know about USAID when he joined?

MATHIA: Nothing.

Q: This is now in like 1970?

MATHIA: Yes, 1970.

Q: Okay, so AID, there had been a predecessor but AID's about—

MATHIA: Alliance for Progress.

Q: It's about nine years old at this point, right?

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: —it's still a pretty new government organization.

MATHIA: Right.

Q: When he got to Washington for his orientation, what did they have him working on?

MATHIA: I know that he did language training. He also interned in the Latin American Bureau. He was living in Arlington Towers in Arlington, Virginia. The summer of 1970 I finished all my coursework for my MAT. All I had left were my written and oral exams. I went to live with him in Arlington Towers until it was time for me to return to IU for my exams.

When I got there, a lot of his time was spent at FSI [Foreign Service Institute] taking his Spanish classes. I would go with him every once in a while in the evening when he went back to the lab to practice. I did not approve of the way FSI taught foreign languages at that time. They hired only native speakers and followed the philosophy that you learn a second language the way a child learns it. They didn't teach any grammar. And they didn't let—at least at that time, I have no idea what it's like now—the students write anything in their books. They were made to practice by memorizing dialogs.

Q: Let's see, this was 1980 [it was 1970], *so I was there about eight years later and it was a—what they did was they made you memorize dialogues and there was a lot of grammar, but you were supposed to memorize those dialogues and really incorporate into your subconscious, I guess, how—you know phrases and things so that you didn't end up—Their philosophy on that was so that you didn't end up translating literally, you know. You just started to understand. And then later you would learn why you say, "tengo sed" for, "I have thirst" instead of—*

MATHIA: Right.

Q: —but we say, "I am thirsty." But they would try to teach you the phrases first. But I don't know if they—I don't remember if they—grammar was pretty painful, so I don't remember not learning grammar but I do remember the pain of having to learn things without knowing why you were learning them.

MATHIA: Right. Not knowing why you were learning them. One time when we went to FSI in the evening, Bob happened to mention, "My wife has a master's degree in Spanish except she hasn't taken her writtens and orals." When some of the fellow students found that out, they came up to me and said, Will you teach me the difference between *ser* [to be] and *estar* [to be]? Will you teach me the difference between *por* [for] and *para* [for]? So, I sat there teaching them those lessons because they wanted to have them. They weren't allowed to write them down in their book. They told me the professor would be upset if he saw rules written down in their books.

Q: Some people like to learn that way—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: But for a lot of adults, it's very hard, right?

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: We wanted to know why.

MATHIA: Yes, Bob's classmates that evening definitely wanted to know why.

Q: And just to go back, ser [to be] and estar [to be] are the two words for—

MATHIA: To be.

Q: Right. But you use them in different—

MATHIA: Right, different situations. You could say, "I am a teacher, *soy profesora*," but "I am sad, *estoy triste*."

Q: Right, right. So he was studying Spanish because he already knew he was going to be working in—

MATHIA: In Honduras.

Q: —In Honduras, so—

MATHIA: His first post.

Q: Okay, and so was he a good language student?

MATHIA: Compared to me, no, but I think for someone who had taken German in high school and did not like learning a foreign language [and was dyslexic but didn't know it at the time], he did well. When we were in Honduras, he was able to understand conversations and speak a little bit in Spanish so I think, yes, for the most part, he was good at Spanish.

Q: So, you were married about a year or two—

MATHIA: We got married in October of 1970 and then in the late summer of 1971 we went to Honduras.

Q: Okay, I was off a little, I'm about twenty years behind him then. Okay. Well—

MATHIA: He's seventy-seven right now.

Q: Well, so, Honduras 1970–71. So, the embassy was probably small, the AID mission was probably big, and the city was probably very sleepy.

MATHIA: Yes, it was. In fact, the AID mission was in the embassy.

Q: And was the embassy downtown then?

MATHIA: Yes, it was downtown.

Q: Okay, so what was it like when you arrived?

MATHIA: I remember coming into the airport, and Bob's immediate boss picked us up. He took us into town to the Hotel Honduras Maya where we stayed until we found a place of our own. Since I spoke Spanish, they expected me to find a place for us, and I wanted to find one that would be covered by our housing allowance. On the way from the airport to the hotel, I kept seeing these signs that said, "*Yankee fuera*" (Yankee out) and I thought, What kind of a country am I in; this is scary. I asked Bob's boss, "Why does it say '*Yankee fuera*'?" He answered, "There was an American consortium on education

that came to Tegucigalpa. They were trying to force their ideas on the Hondurans who didn't want to have any part in it. Those signs are in protest of it."

That was my first introduction to Honduras, but it turned out to be a very friendly place. We made some very good Honduran friends while we were there. It wasn't what I was expecting from just seeing the *Yankee fuera* at the beginning.

Q: Was your home near the university or—

MATHIA: We were in three different homes when we were there, and I think you could, from our last house, see a little bit of the university.

Q: Okay. But did you live near other American embassy folks?

MATHIA: They were dispersed throughout the community. Our immediate neighbors were always Hondurans.

Q: And the ambassador's residence was on the other side of town, like up a mountain?

MATHIA: You know what, I'm not even sure where the ambassador's residence was. I don't remember that.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: I remember in the Dominican Republic, but I don't remember in Honduras, where it was.

Q: Okay, so what kind of job did he—did Bob—

MATHIA: Since he had a degree in economics, he was in the Project Development Office, referred to as PDO. At this first post Bob was an international development intern [IDI]. When I was asked what my husband did, I would jokingly reply, "He's an IDI in PDO for AID." The government does like its acronyms.

Q: And was it a big office? Or was AID a sizable mission?

MATHIA: I think it was just he, a Honduran that eventually became a really good friend of ours, and his boss. I don't think there was anybody else, I think it was just a three-person office.

Q: Okay. And were they doing a lot of agricultural development or education or—

MATHIA: They were doing all kinds of projects. I think they were working on housing and education while we were there. They were also doing a cadaster and working with

the police. Bob has recently mentioned they need to once again help on how to police due to all the problems Honduras is currently having.

Q: Right, right. Yeah, so they had huge land problems—land disputes and they had a land reform when I was working there, but—

MATHIA: Oh, so you were still working on something like that when you were stationed there?

Q: I worked in 2001 as the economic counselor and we had a whole spade of American citizens who had bought land and someone said, "Oh, no, your title's not right and that's my land."

MATHIA: I guess they didn't do a good cadaster back then, did they?

Q: No, the cadaster was useful if they followed it but they didn't always show them. I remember going to the San Juan islands and visiting the office and they would show us how some of the maps—some of their deeds and things were crumbling. You know, they were the old Spanish, you know. But they were trying to get the cadastral information. I think on the internet maybe.

MATHIA: So, this was—

Q: Two thousand and one.

MATHIA: We were there from '71 to '76 so that means twenty-five years later, and they still didn't have it solved.

Q: Well, no, I don't think certain countries in Latin America—I don't know they'll ever be solved, right?

MATHIA: That's true.

Q: The land reform brought some problems, so—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: And Honduras is a tragedy that way, because it was really the only thing they had, so—and it was a very mountainous country so—arable land. Yeah, no I—this is more about you than me, but the—I had an opportunity to have a higher-level job as a counselor in either Nicaragua and Honduras and I chose Honduras to apply for because I knew they had a lot of expropriations in Nicaragua and I didn't want to deal with it.

Well, I got to Honduras and I found out that was half my job. But, yes, everything that AID did was always useful. But they were apart—I don't think they were—I got to know

them pretty well. I'm mixing it up a little bit with—yeah, no I worked with them very, very closely when I got there. And I was there after Hurricane Mitch, so the development agencies had—you know there was a lot of activity that was just winding down. So, I guess my question was, were you in shock? Were you happy? Were you saying, "What have I gotten myself into?" It was a very undeveloped place.

MATHIA: I didn't feel like the town itself—Tegucigalpa—didn't seem undeveloped to me. It just seemed like it wasn't any different than living in Mishawaka. It had everything that I needed, so I wasn't shocked to be there. And I think knowing Spanish helped. But I wasn't in shock with the country, I think I was in shock with the Foreign Service.

Q: Okay, tell us about that.

MATHIA: We were still living in the hotel when I found out I had to have calling cards printed up and make social visits to the spouses of those in higher positions in AID. I never realized that I would have to make visits to those wives and go to teas and leave my calling card. I had no knowledge of any of that, so I kind of learned about it as it happened to me, and I committed quite a few faux pas during that time.

For example, I was told that I was going to go to the mission director's house for a tea, and it was going to be all the spouses that were new at the time, and that they would have a driver come and pick me up to take me there since we didn't yet have our car. There was a woman whose husband was an NGO [non-governmental organization] that was at the hotel too, and she had some experience so I asked her, "What should I wear for this?" Her answer, "Well probably not pants," because in the early '70s pants weren't yet appropriate. I also asked if I needed to wear nylons. She said, "No, probably not," and I was happy because it was very hot and humid with no air conditioning. And I thought, "It will be nice, I don't have to wear nylons."

I went to my first tea, and I was the only one there who wasn't wearing nylons. I realized I hadn't been given very good advice, and I felt very exposed. Later on, there was another tea for me to attend, and on the invitation was a note reminding me that I should wear nylons!

I lived through it. Our first dinner was at the deputy mission director's [DPM] house where he and his wife were entertaining the new arrivals at post. Once we arrived, the DPM introduced us to other new arrivals, and then he asked me what I would like to drink. I didn't imbibe much. All I'd ever had were screwdrivers that Bob's friend served us at his house back in Indiana. I was embarrassed to ask for a screwdriver and didn't know the names of any other alcoholic beverages. Fortunately, the post had a new executive director who was very nice and came to my rescue. She said, "Oh Carol, you would probably like a Cuba Libre, it's just rum and coke." So, I asked for that. Because of this incident, the DPM's wife realized I was a neophyte that doesn't know the ropes. When we were seated for dinner, I was seated right next to the mission director. They were serving lamb, which I, of course, had never eaten. The DPM's wife looked right at

me and said, “Carol, the green is the mint jelly that goes with the lamb, and the red is for the rolls.” I thought, Well that’s real nice. She realizes I’m ignorant, and I need to be told that.

Q: Aw.

MATHIA: Karma came to the rescue. Honduras is known for its monsoons which we were experiencing that evening. A leak appeared in the dining room, right above the mission director’s head, so that he had to be reseated. Later on at post, I told this story to a friend. Her reply was, “Didn’t you know that we say ‘Don’t—[the last name of the DPM and his wife]? The wife is a snob.”

Q: I think that changed in—at least in the Foreign Service at least ten years later with the—there were suits about how women were treated in the Foreign Service and their—

MATHIA: No, I specifically remember that it was 1972 for the directive that spouses were no longer to be evaluated on their husband’s annual performance appraisals. I’ve always felt that was the saving grace for Bob because he didn’t have to worry about me being part of his evaluation. I have been reading some of the ADST spousal interviews, and I was surprised to see that not all spouses felt as I did. Some of those a generation before me were upset with this directive. They felt important and useful being part of their spouse’s evaluation.

Q: And you didn’t have children yet?

MATHIA: No, no. But they were both born while we were in Honduras. I went back to the States for Michelle, but then I stayed in Honduras for Jenny.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: Jenny was born in Comayagüela, at the hospital there.

Q: So how many years were you there?

MATHIA: We were there from 1971–1976.

Q: Okay. And did you get to travel around the coast and see different things?

MATHIA: Yes. We flew to the Bay Islands once on AIDs five or six-seater plane. We also visited Tatumbla, Zamorano, and San Pedro Sula. We went to a beach in southern Honduras, Cedeño, with Luís and Erlinda, our good Honduran friends. We got bad sunburns there!

Q: And Zamorano was an agricultural school.

MATHIA: Right, right. It was interesting touring that.

Q: So, did you apply for a teaching job?

MATHIA: When we first got there, I wanted to teach but I got there too late for the school year. They had already hired everyone. I did substitute teaching and then a position opened up teaching English to seventh and eighth graders. A teacher who had been a guidance counselor at the school had had a heart attack, and for some reason he thought that teaching would be easier on him than counseling, so he took a job as a teacher instead. His teacher's salary was less than the salary he got as a guidance counselor. When he discovered there was a Honduran law that you can change positions in a company, but your pay could not be lowered, he quit. He took the school to court because he said, "You've been giving me a teacher's salary and you should have kept me at the salary I had as a counselor." He quit working during the court case, and they hired me to take his job. I had no idea that all this had transpired before I got hired.

I was teaching his classes, middle school English. One day I got a note saying go to the office as soon as possible. My first planning period I went to the office, and they told me, Mr. Morris won his court case, so he's being reinstated, so we no longer need your services. I said, "Are you firing me? I signed a contract, and you're firing me?" And they said, "Well we're not firing you, it's that the court says he had to have his job back. But, would you mind teaching until he is able to return. We're not sure exactly when he is coming back." Being the naive person that I was, I said, "Sure I will."

I continued teaching for about two more weeks. Then one day—I walked to school, because our house was within walking distance—I walked to school and the director of the school met me in the entryway. He said, "Mr. Morris is back today so we won't need you." I got to turn around and walk back home! A few days later a member of the school board who worked for the United States Information Service [USIS] came to my house and apologized for how I had been treated. He said, "This whole situation should never have happened to you, and the very first position that opens up that you're qualified for, you will get." Eventually, I was able to take over for another middle school teacher that had gone back to the States.

Q: Is this the Honduras American School?

MATHIA: The American School, yes. The American School of Honduras.

Q: Okay. So, what percentage of the children were expats?

MATHIA: I would say at most 10-20 percent. It was mostly Honduran.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: Yes, about 20 percent. I know because one semester they, the Hondurans, had to take a course called Honduran Civics. They called it *Moral* in Spanish. It was taught only in Spanish, and the American students didn't know enough Spanish to be able to take the class. I was asked if I would teach an area studies class to the six Americans while the around twenty-four Honduras were taking *Moral*. I agreed and was given six booklets, each one dealing with the history, culture, politics, and geography of a different country. I taught using those books. I thought, I'll just read a chapter ahead of them, and I'll be able to teach it.

That's what I did, but I let the six students know that I was not trained to teach that subject matter. They would come up with questions sometimes, and I would say, "I don't know the answer to that, but I'll get back to you tomorrow with it." I would go home and ask Bob the question and he'd be able to answer it. I'd come back the next day and give them the answer. One day in class I asked the students, "Would you like to meet your other teacher?" And they said, "Sure," so I got permission from the school and from their parents for them to come to our house one night for sloppy joes and, more importantly, to meet their other teacher, my husband, Bob.

Maybe it was a year later, I was teaching a class, and I walked into the room and on the teacher's wooden desk somebody had drawn a penis the size of the desk. And I thought, "How do I handle this?" I had never had any classes on handling discipline problems in teaching, which I think Schools of Education now offer. I just said, "Who did this?" like an idiot. "Who did this?" as if one of them would admit, "I did it, I did it." Of course, no one replied, so I spent the period just erasing the penis since it was drawn in pencil and saying if no one admits to doing this then they all were going to have detention. It turned into a very, very long class of just silent students watching their teacher erasing the penis on the desk. When the bell rang, I said, "Okay, everybody's going to be assigned detention, since no one would admit they did this." On the way out a Honduran boy stopped by my desk and asked, "Mrs. Mathia, do the Americans get detention too?" I replied, "Well, yes, because I don't know who did it. It could have been an American, so everybody gets detention."

And for years I thought, "Why would he ask me that? Why would he think that the Americans wouldn't get detention if I don't know who did it and it could have been an American too?" Then I realized that the semester before was when I had those six Americans over to my house, and I think maybe the Honduran students thought I was showing favoritism to the American kids, not realizing that it was just that they were meeting their other teacher. It was a mistake I made as a teacher. It was not a good idea to do that because the Honduran kids misinterpreted it.

Q: Well, it also means it was probably a Honduran who did the drawing.

MATHIA: It didn't matter.

Q: So, this was your first real teaching, right?

MATHIA: This was the first time I ever really taught, yes. I taught at Indiana University, but that was college students, so that wasn't a problem.

Q: So, was it a good way to get started?

MATHIA: I think so, I think it was. I don't think it would have been any different if I had taught in America in a high school. I think it would have been the same.

Q: And you were teaching English?

MATHIA: I was teaching mainly English, yes. But—

Q: So—

MATHIA: —regular English, they did not have ESL [English as a second language]. But I would incorporate ideas of ESL to the kids because for most of them, English was a second language.

Q: So, you were teaching like English literature or something?

MATHIA: I taught grammar.

Q: Grammar. Oh, and writing.

MATHIA: —And I also taught literature. Yes, I taught both. I can remember that sometimes the kids would say to me, Well when you're spelling and you make a noun plural, how do you know when you add an "s" or you add "i-e-s"? How do you know that? And I didn't know how to answer because I had learned it intuitively. There was another teacher at the school who was French, married to a Honduran. I would go to her and ask the same question. She told me that if there's a vowel before the "y," you simply add "s." But if there's a consonant before the "y," you change the "y" to "i" and add "e-s." She had learned the rules because English was a second language for her. None of my ESL courses in college taught those rules, and I hadn't run across a book that taught the rules either. Instead, I would always go to her for the rules as students asked for them. I was learning how to teach ESL through the French lady who also taught English at the school.

Q: And the school was run fairly well? There were—

MATHIA: I would say, no. They had quite a few problems. By law the assistant—at least the assistant—had to be a Honduran. And so, this one woman was hired, and she did not have good English. I remember going to faculty meetings where she would say something and she was trying to tell us we couldn't do that, and she'd say what we couldn't do as a positive statement, and then she'd end by saying, "No can do, no can

do." So, she had very poor English. Then they also had the problem with Mr. Morris who was rehired. I can't remember specifically, but they had other problems, too.

Q: I remember in our little school thirty years later, my kids were struggling a little with Spanish, and the Spanish teacher they had just didn't really know how to teach it. And so the principal at that time—this was Discovery School—said, "Well, I just don't think at those teaching schools they don't teach them those usual concepts of—I forget what they were, but you know, including evaluation. All the different stages of a curriculum. They didn't really have that kind of training so he felt like he was teaching pedagogy while he was managing this little school without any resources, but— And then some of those kids came from very wealthy—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: —families and they didn't have much discipline, right?

MATHIA: Yes, yes. I can remember there was a boy at the school that had a big scar on his neck. Another teacher told me that for his fifteenth birthday he was given a sports car and he was racing it and got into an accident. The very noticeable scar was from the accident. I was told he was lucky he survived the accident. In spite of this, you'd still see him coming up to school to park his car and he'd be driving really fast and squealing his tires as he parked his car. I thought, Well that didn't teach him anything, did it? He almost died, and it didn't teach him anything. So, yes there were very wealthy kids that had a very different lifestyle than ours, but most of them were just typical teenagers, I think.

Q: Okay, and then did you keep teaching after your daughters were born?

MATHIA: Yes, yes. I had a six week leave of absence after I had Michelle, but then I went back and I taught. Even after Jenny I taught. Yes, I kept teaching. I had the advantage of having a maid that lived in and was there for my daughters. I had my own, you know, built in daycare, so I was lucky.

Q: Right. Yes, it's pretty affordable in Central America to have some live-in help.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: And live-in housekeepers and nannies. So was there anything happening in the country or in the mission that was notable? I think it was probably a military government.

MATHIA: Oh, there was a coup when we were there. It was when my husband was duty officer. We had this habit of just turning on the radio when we were getting ready for work when all of a sudden one morning they were playing martial music and we wondered why. When it stopped, they mentioned that the ruler had been overthrown and he was no longer the leader. I said—Bob didn't understand it, they were speaking too fast

for him—and I said, "Oh, they said there's been a coup." And Bob said, "Well I'm the duty officer, I better call and see what I'm supposed to do." He called the embassy and was told, "No, everything's under control, you're okay." I guess they'd done it so well—they'd had so many coups—that they just knew what to do, because they went to the current leader's house and just—he answered the door and he was in his pajamas still and they just told him he was no longer the leader.

Q: I just—I was just going to look up who the ambassador to Honduras was at that time, and I saw a friend of mine's name pop up, because she's the chargé, she's not a confirmed ambassador. So, let's see, so 19—

MATHIA: Seventy-one to '76 is when we were there.

Q: I'm just curious about one thing. So someone named Hewson Ryan and then Phillip Sanchez, because there was a lady named Jaramillo at one point—but she must have—

MATHIA: I don't really remember who the ambassador was when we were there.

Q: Yeah. So, you were—AID was very separate from the embassy, it sounds like. Even though it was in the embassy you didn't really feel—you didn't go to the ambassador's house or things like that.

MATHIA: No, we didn't. I did inappropriate things during our tour in Honduras, just like I did when we first arrived at post. I was having problems with the birth control pill that I was on. I had to stop using the pill, and we were making trips to El Salvador to get an IUD [intrauterine device] since they weren't available in Honduras. I was called up by one of the embassy wives to make cookies for some to-do that the ambassador's wife was having, and I replied, "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm too busy, I can't do that." And I don't even remember the name of the ambassador or anything, but when they were scheduled to leave post, they had three really big parties to say goodbye to everybody, including our Honduran friend and his wife since he had worked for AID. But Bob and I were never invited, and I think that was her way of saying, you don't say no when you're asked to make cookies for me.

Q: Aw. But you were traveling. I was looking because there have only been two ambassadors—lady ambassadors, and Mari-Luci Jaramillo, she was from New Mexico, and she was appointed in—

MATHIA: I think it was a male ambassador when we were there.

Q: Right. It was later, 1977. Mari-Luci. But she was a very lovely lady, but she was the first female ambassador, so—

MATHIA: Talking about the coup earlier reminded me of something comical that happened. The president that was overthrown lived across the street from a very good

friend of mine. One time I was going to visit her in the morning, early in the morning. Bob drove me to her house on his way to work. I knew she wasn't yet awake, so I sat down on the sidewalk in front of her house and waited for her. As I said before, the president lived across the street from her. [That's how we knew that he was in his pajamas when they came to his house and announced to him that he was no longer president.] Of course, he had a body guard stationed in front with a pistol in his holster. I was young and relatively pretty at the time, and he tried to impress me. He took his pistol out and started twirling it around his finger, but then it fell onto the ground. So, I immediately looked the other way and acted as if I hadn't seen what happened to save him the embarrassment.

Q: No. Something like that happened when my parents were visiting me, I think in Guatemala, and—or we went to Guatemala and they never got over that, yeah. How policemen acted. So, did you write letters home? Did your sister visit? Your parents?

MATHIA: I did write letters home, but I would write with carbon paper because this was before word processing or email. I didn't want to have to write separate letters to everybody living in different places. The solution was to write with carbon paper pressing really hard so I could make enough copies to send them to everyone. To even make a phone call, you had to book a time at this special building. You then went there at your specified time to make your long-distance phone call. We did not do that very often since it was such a bother.

My twin did visit one summer when we were in Honduras. We went with her to Santa Rosa de Copán, some Mayan ruins.

Q: So, how did Bob feel about his job? Did he like it?

MATHIA: I think he liked it very much. He very much enjoyed his whole time in the Foreign Service. In fact, I believe he really misses that period in his life.

Q: Okay. And what about you? Were you wondering what you had gotten into or was it just an adventure?

MATHIA: No, no, I saw it as an adventure, and to me it was a cheap way to see the world. You got paid for it and you got to experience the country in which you were living but also travel to the countries near your post.

Q: Okay. Alrighty. And, so, how does it work in AID, it's not the same schedule that we have in the State Department, right? How do you know how long you're going to be at a post, or what your next post is going to be?

MATHIA: Right. A tour is usually two years, but you can re-up if you want. And we had early on decided that we would always stay at a post as long as we could because we felt once we had children it would be good for them to stay as long as possible to make it

seem more like home. We were able to stay in Honduras for five years. That was, you know, ideal for us because it let us really know what the country was like and feel like it was home.

Q: And then what process was it to find out that he would be going to—

MATHIA: When your tour is up you fill out a wish-list saying which countries you would like to go to. You give your top three, and then hopefully you get one of those top three.

Q: And so, what did he end up getting next?

MATHIA: After Honduras we were sent to Panama.

Q: Okay. Were you happy about that?

MATHIA: Yes, I was happy in Panama.

Q: Okay. Well, I think we'll break there, and then we'll do it next time. So, I'm going to stop recording now.

MATHIA: Okay.

Q: So good afternoon, it is June 30, 2021. Don't know how that happened and we are continuing our conversation with Carol Mathia. So, Carol, we were talking last time about your time in Honduras. Both of your children—your daughters—were born there, or born while you were there.

MATHIA: Right. One of them was born back in the States.

Q: And in fact, maybe we could start off as we resume—I think it was Jenny, who was born in Honduras, so—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: —that was a bit of an adventure, I'm sure. And then after she was born and trying to document everything, I'm sure was an adventure too. So, let's hear about it.

MATHIA: Since Jenny was born in Honduras, the Consular Office told me that in order for her to get a birth certificate proving she was a U.S. citizen, there was a form they would give me that I had to take to a Honduran government office to be filled out. I did so and returned to the Consular Office with the form. I was told there were too many errors on the form. They gave me a new form to go try again. I went back a second time, did the same thing, and took the form back to the Consular Office. Once again, I was told there were still too many errors. The third time I took it back, I had to once again wait in line a long time to get to the government official who would fill in the blanks in the form.

This time, I asked him if I could type it up for him, but he said no. The typos they made the previous two times were mainly with Jenny's and our names, and I thought it might be better if I typed it. I don't think the official was very happy with my suggestion. He felt insulted. But, fortunately by the third time it was typed with few enough errors that they were able to take it and issue her a birth certificate.

Then I decided that just as a novelty for her, I would get her a Honduran passport since she was born in Honduras. I went through the whole process of getting her the passport, standing in many lines. Doing this, doing that, and everything. Very bureaucratic. And then finally it was completed, and they said since she's a minor, it would have to be signed by a parent. I was getting ready to sign it and they said, "No, no, no. You can't sign it; the father has to sign it." That was the law there. I was rather upset because I thought, I'm the one that went through all this process, stood in all these lines, waited all this time, and I can't sign it. Grrr.

Q: That's right.

MATHIA: It was good that I did it because when she was in kindergarten, she loved taking it to show and tell and saying, "I was born in Honduras, and I have this passport because I was born in Honduras." It was worth the effort.

Q: I'm trying to remember, because I think I told you I served there, my kids were in elementary school when we were there. But it seemed to me that in a lot of countries, the kid's passports and visas were actually part of the parent's passports, so I don't know if it was like that—if it was a big deal to get her to get her very own.

MATHIA: That part didn't give me a problem, just that the male really does dominate there so that even if you want to take your child—you have passports and you want to take your child out of the country, you have to have the permission of the father. It was very frustrating.

Q: That's fascinating. That I—

MATHIA: It was very male-oriented back then.

Q: Well, no, even later, because I remember—and that's for protection, I think, so it's probably still like that today. So, when I served there, 2001–2004, my husband was in Washington and for me to bring them out of the country to Washington where he was—I can't remember what I had to do, but it was always complicated. But the day I left and I had to take not only the kids, with all their paperwork, but the dog and the two cats, and all their paperwork, I really think that was more stressful than divorce or changing jobs, or anything else. It just happened to be Honduras—doing it in Honduras, on a hot day.

MATHIA: Yes. Oh, yes. I can empathize.

Q: But, the idea of making sure that both parents okay their departure from country I think is a protection for the kids, and I think for the moms, I think too.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: So, one thing about your experience is that you weren't immersed all the time with events with embassy folks, so I imagine you made—and you were teaching, so, I imagine you made some good Honduran friends?

MATHIA: We had one couple we did many, many things with. It was the one post where we really got to know local people do things with them. It happened kind of serendipitously. Our air freight did not arrive in a timely manner. It had gotten sent to Singapore or Thailand by accident. When it finally arrived, you could see it had been broken into and some of my things—some of my clothes had been taken from it. My sewing machine was also in the container. It had gotten ruined in the shipping and needed to be repaired.

Bob was working in the Project Development Office, and there was a Foreign Service national [FSN] there, Luis Zelaya, who was also working there. Bob told him the story about our air freight. Luis was soon to get married, and he told his soon-to-be-bride, Erlindq, about what had happened. She was a very good seamstress and without even knowing me, she had Luis bring her sewing machine to my house to use while she was on her honeymoon. She gave it to me, and I had not yet met her. We were invited to their wedding. That's when I first met her. At the reception, they came to our table and I told her, "Thank you for loaning it to me."

After they were married and settled, they had us over, and then we had them over, and we just started really doing a lot of things with them.

After I knew Erlinda fairly well, she told me the story of her life. She was born in a small town that was a banana town—banana plantation. There was an American man whose family lived in Tegucigalpa. He would go to Erlinda's town and work as a crop duster for the banana plantation. Sometimes his wife would go with him when he went, just for something different, I guess. Erlinda was part of a really large family, and her father worked on the banana plantation. He was a bit of an alcoholic and from the little Erlinda revealed about him, he wasn't very nice to his family. She was about five and the wife of the crop duster observed that she was a bright little girl. She convinced Erlinda's mother to let her take her to Tegucigalpa and raise her, so she could have a better life. Erlinda knew nothing about this upcoming arrangement. The day that they came to visit, Erlinda said she was dressed up in her Sunday best. They told her that this lady was going to take her to Tegucigalpa for a trip, but she didn't know she was going to stay.

She ended up staying and going to a local school—a Catholic school for girls—and once she graduated eighth grade, they decided that they were going to have her go to school in the States. The lady had a friend in, it was either Arkansas or Kansas, and they sent her to

that family where she did four years of high school. After high school, she came back to Tegucigalpa and got a job with SAHSA [*Servicio Aéreo de Honduras* (Air Service of Honduras)], the Honduran airlines. When she met Luis and they dated, she told him that she was not going to marry him until she had her mother really settled. She earned enough money to bring her mother to Tegucigalpa and put her in a house. She told Luis, "I still want to put a fence around it and some other things. Once I have that all done then I'll marry you." And that's what she did.

One Mother's Day, Erlinda told me, "Mother's Day is always difficult for me. I really have three mothers. I have my biological mother, and I have the woman that raised me in Tegucigalpa, and then the one I was with in the States." So, I told her that she needed to write a book about her life because it was a pretty interesting life.

Q: And so when you met her was she—did she stay working?

MATHIA: Yes, she was still working but I don't think she was working for SAHSA anymore. She was working for some American, she was a secretary for him. I remember because Thanksgiving came around, and I needed a dressing recipe. She got one from her boss. The dressing recipe I use to this day was from Erlinda's boss via Erlinda. Every Thanksgiving when I make dressing, I think of her.

When they would have us over for meals, we would never have drinks with ice in them. Erlinda once took me aside and said, "I notice that when we eat at your house you put ice in your drinks, but when you come to our house you never put ice in your drinks. Why is that?" I explained it this way: "We have weaker stomachs than you guys, and we have to have boiled water for our ice cubes or we might get sick." Then the next time they had us over, they were very happy and they said, "We're going to give you ice cubes in your drinks this time because we boiled the water and we made the ice cubes for you." We said, "Okay, that's very nice of you to have gone to that bother for us." Luis took the ice cubes out of the freezer and ran them under the un-boiled tap water to make it easier to release them. Bob and I looked at each other and thought, "Hmm, well we really can't drink with those ice cubes because they've been contaminated, but we don't want to hurt their feelings." We decided to take the risk and drink with their ice cubes.

Q: Yes, there's a lot of risk of getting sick. It's an operational hazard of the lifestyle, I think—

MATHIA: Right.

Q: —Because we—lots of other different microbes and things.

MATHIA: Yes, I think some people are more susceptible too, because my husband was always much more susceptible than I was. We'd go to a restaurant and I'd have the salad even though I wasn't supposed to, and I'd be okay, but he took all kinds of precautions and he'd still get sick.

Q: This biggest thing for me was in my first posting they had wonderful fruit in Mexico and I wasn't allowed to eat the strawberries, right.

MATHIA: Oh. We would eat the strawberries, but we would soak them in Clorox water first.

Q: Yes. It makes a little bit of a difference.

MATHIA: Yes, and if I did clean the strawberries that way, I usually ended up making jam with them instead because they just didn't look nice to eat.

But then later on, I can't remember which country we were in—maybe it was Pakistan—where the British were talking about how they used something called "pinky" and I don't know what it—it was a pink color—and they just said that they soak their vegetables in pinky first, just so long, and then you don't have to rinse them off or anything, you just eat them after they've been in the pinky. So, I got some at, I guess, at a drugstore. I would use that instead of clorox. If it worked for the Brits, I thought, "It will probably work for us too," and it did.

Q: Excellent. And then you had an encounter with robbery and dealing with the police at one point?

MATHIA: Yes, yes.

Q: Do you want to tell us about that?

MATHIA: Yes. In the second house that we lived in, we had a shed in the back that was full of Bob's tools. It was July 4, and we went to the American school for fireworks because they were having a fireworks display for the Americans there in celebration of July 4. When we got back home, we saw that our shed had been broken into and some of the tools were stolen. Our insurance company told us that if we wanted to file a claim, we had to have a police report. We went down to a police station and told them that we needed to file a report for our insurance company. The first thing the policeman told us was that he had to write the report on special paper called *papel sellado* (sealed or stamped paper), but he said we had to go buy it. He told us where we could get some. We went and bought it and came back with it, so he could fill out the report.

While filling out the report, he asked us, "Did anything happen that day, did anybody come to your house, any strangers or anything?" We said, "Yes, well, come to think of it, somebody did come to the house that day and was trying to sell us something and we said, 'No we're not interested.'" He said, "Could you describe that person?" We told about how tall he was, and then we said, "He was Black." The policeman replied, "Black?" And we said, "Well, yes, Black, he was not white. He was Black." He then asked, "But was he *moreno* (dark-skinned), *café* (brown), *trigueño* (olive-skinned)?" And

I thought, Are there that many different shades of Black? I see a person as a Black or white, I didn't see any varied shades. We told him we were unable to be that exact.

Then I realized that on Honduran passports, an identifying mark besides height and weight is skin color, exact skin color. At least back then they had that category. We had some Hondurans tell us, We're not prejudiced like Americans, and I thought, Hmm, maybe you're a little bit, but you just don't realize it.

Q: It was also sort of a heritage of Spanish-speaking countries that they tended to—or even non-Spanish-speaking—but in the western hemisphere that was a part of colonial rule, I think. So, yes. Any other kind of lifestyle things that are different? This time there weren't chains, many American hotels, or restaurants, or— No fast food yet, I know, but—

MATHIA: No, they didn't have any chains back then except right towards the end of our tour, they got a McDonald's, but it didn't last. I don't know why, but it didn't. It must not have been popular.

We did so many things with Luis and Erlinda. They taught us to play dominoes and poker using frijoles as our betting chips. We taught them how to play euchre, it was always the women against the men. When we won, Erlinda would always say to Bob, "I won you, I won you!" And I would say, "No, my husband is not your prize, you beat him." That's because in Spanish *ganar* can mean to win or to beat and she would mix it up, and she would do that continuously every time we would play.

Q: Because it was a literal translation from Spanish, right?

MATHIA: Yes, *ganar* can either mean to win or to beat, and she would use the wrong one when she beat him in the game. She would always say, "I won you." And I said, "No, you don't get my husband as a prize." Every time, she'd do that.

Q: Well in the meantime were there a lot— Oh, go ahead.

MATHIA: Luís got a scholarship from AID to go to New Mexico and get a degree in economics to get a masters. We had been with him for about two years and then they had to leave. We were very, very sad, because we really—they were our best friends, and we really did a lot with them. We would write back and forth, Erlinda and I, and when I was pregnant with Michelle, I wrote her a letter saying, "I'm pregnant with my first child." And then a couple days later I got this letter, and she was saying she was pregnant with her first child. She was in New Mexico when her son was born, so her first child was born in the States, and I went back to the States and had my first child. And then when they came back, we both got pregnant and our second children were both born in Honduras.

One of Luis' aunts once said, "I don't know about the Mathias and the Zelayas. They do everything together. They even get pregnant at the same time." So, it was a funny joke amongst them. And then after Luís came back—they came back after two years, so we got to spend another year and a half with them. When he came back, he got a job with CABEI, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration. He was traveling for CABEI on a trip to the States once. When he came back at the airport in Miami, he bought some McDonald's french fries. When he got to Tegucigalpa, he had his wife take him directly to our house from the airport. I was pregnant with Jenny at the time. He knew I liked french fries, and he brought these french fries from Florida to me. We didn't have microwaves back then, so they didn't taste very good, but the thought was what counted.

Q: That's right.

MATHIA: That's what they did, that's how close we were.

Q: That's right. And, so in 1976, you moved to Panama. Did you go home first, to the States?

MATHIA: No, it was a direct transfer. We went from Tegucigalpa to Panama City.

Q: Did you drive?

MATHIA: No, we sold our cars to Hondurans before we left, so we flew, and the girls were one and two and a half at the time, and both of them happened to have diarrhea on the day we were supposed to have the flight. Before the flight we had to hold them down and hold their noses and fill them with Kaopectate in hopes that it would help. It didn't help, so the whole flight Bob sat in his seat holding one of our daughters. I never sat down. I spent the time taking Michelle and going to change her diaper, bringing her back, putting her on his lap, then taking Jennifer, and changing her diaper. The whole flight I went to the lavatory and back, to the lavatory and back. I never sat in my seat the whole flight. It was just one of those things that happens when you're in the Foreign Service.

Q: When you got there, you did end up teaching, but it was a different kind of teaching? Is that right?

MATHIA: Yes, the only American schools they had were Department of Defense [DOD] schools. I went to see if I could get a job, but I was told that they don't hire from within the country, only from overseas, and those people are then required to go teach in whatever country to which they are assigned. They would not hire me, but they would let me do substitute teaching. Once I substitute taught at the Canal Zone College [CZC], the only Department of Defense school that is post-secondary. Then the head of the English Department at the college offered me a full-time position teaching ESL. I guess they were exempt from the rule that all employees must be hired from overseas. Anyway, they hired me. I very much enjoyed teaching there. It was in the evening. Unlike in Honduras, our

maid did not live in Panama. When Bob came home from work, I would leave to go teach at the Canal Zone College.

When the treaty between Panama and the U.S. was passed returning the Panama Canal to the Panamanians, the Canal Zone College no longer existed. It became the Panama Canal College. It was no longer part of the U.S. government. Eventually when we got posted to Panama a second time, I once again taught there but it was no longer CZC. It became Panama Canal College and was no longer part of the DOD system. So, I taught there under both systems, which was kind of a neat thing to be able to say. Probably most people couldn't say they did that.

Q: So, how was the salary for—it was a part of DOD—I mean, was it decent or did you feel like it was really low?

MATHIA: You know what, I really don't remember, so it must not have been that bad if I don't remember.

Q: Right, exactly.

MATHIA: I know when I taught in Honduras it was low compared to what teachers made in the States.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: Always when I taught overseas, the pay for those employed from within the country was not as much as it was for direct hire employees. Even in Pakistan when I taught at the International School of Islamabad since I was not a direct hire, I did not get paid as much. It was still a fairly good salary, but it was not as good as people who were direct hires. For some reason if they don't have to recruit you, they don't pay you as much.

Q: Was this the first time—I'm sorry if I'm forgetting something—was this the first time you were teaching ESL, English as a Second Language?

MATHIA: Yes and no. I did teach English at the American school in Honduras. It was supposed to be regular English, but almost all of my students were Honduran, so I used a lot of ESL knowledge when I taught them because they needed that to help them with the kind of mistakes they made. When I taught ESL in Honduras, I noticed the kind of mistakes my students made because of Spanish interference. For example, students would say to me, "I'm late because I lost the bus." And I said, "You mean you missed the bus," because *perder* means to lose or to miss and they used the wrong form. So, I started keeping track of all of those mistakes, and over time I made a workbook with eight different chapters, and each chapter covered twelve different kinds of errors that students made.

When I taught at CZC, I gave handouts to my students from the workbook I'd made. We would go over those mistakes, and then I would collect those worksheets to use with another class that I was also teaching. But I realized not all the worksheets were being returned. I thought, I think they're taking them home because they want to use them and keep them for themselves. I complained to the two other ESL teachers about that and they said, What are these sheets that you're using? I showed them to the two teachers. They wanted to use them in their classes too. One of the teachers had a military spouse, while the other was married to a man that worked for Xerox in Panama. She got her husband to run off booklets of the lessons, and we would use the booklets in class. Sometimes the booklets didn't come back either.

Q: But now you're teaching at the university student level?

MATHIA: Yes, this was university students that I was using this with.

Q: So, how did—was there a big difference between teaching children and young adults?

MATHIA: Well, the big difference was there weren't any discipline problems ever.

Q: That's good. Tell us a little about the Zone—the Panama Canal Zone—and what it was like. And you didn't live in the Zone, I think, you probably lived somewhere—

MATHIA: Yes. We had to live in the city, but I was in the Zone a lot because I taught there, and also, we had commissary privileges and PX [post exchange] privileges. I would do all my grocery shopping—virtually all my grocery shopping—there and then other shopping that I needed from the PX would be there.

Q: So, what was it like?

MATHIA: One thing I remember is that when you went to the commissary to buy groceries, you never should buy ice cream or anything that was frozen on the day after all of the military—the lower military ranks got their paychecks. Most of them did a big shop the day after payday. You would be way back in line waiting to pay for your groceries and if you had ice cream, it would be melted by the time you got waited on.

And then something that was different there too was that once you left the grocery store, you still had the things in your cart, and there would be Panamanian children that you would pay to take your cart to your car and unload it. It was just the way that some of the poor Panamanians made money. They would let them come in and do that.

Q: But there were—so the Panama Canal Zone was basically a little piece of American inside—

MATHIA: Yes, yes.

Q: It wasn't just like a military base, it was more, colonial almost, right?

MATHIA: There were people called "Zonians" there too. They were Americans, not military, that worked and lived in the Zone. Some of them had been born in the Zone and they only went back to the States when their parents went back. They didn't grow up in the States at all. During the time that we were in Panama, they were re-negotiating the Panama Canal treaty, giving the canal back to the Panamanians. A lot of the Zonians were very worried because of this. Some of them had never, ever, lived in the States, and they didn't know what was going to happen when it went back to the Panamanians. They were very nervous and just didn't know what to think about it. I think that maybe our government didn't do a real good job of keeping them apprised of what was going on and how it would affect them.

When we were on home leave, we bought a twenty-four-foot Sea Ray, a boat that we took back to Panama to use while we were there. My husband was a real boat person, and he wanted to do that. We also bought a trailer hitch that we put in our air freight, so it would arrive before the boat, and we could attach it to our car so that once the boat arrived, we would have a way to get it to our house. Unfortunately, the boat arrived before our air freight, so we had no way to get the boat to the house. When the boat arrived, we were called and told to come pick up our boat. Bob told them, "I don't have any way of getting it home, I don't have a trailer hitch yet." They told us, "We'll keep it on a box car in the zone here on the train tracks."

It looked a lot bigger sitting on the box car rather than floating on water. On the boat was a sign that said, "Robert Mathia, USAID." Because of the whole Panama Canal treaty being negotiated and the fears of the Zonians, rumors were started that the U.S. government had bought a boat for Torrijos so that if things ever got bad for him, he could escape to the island of Contadora using this boat. It became a really big rumor. It was so bad, it got back to the State Department in DC. Strom Thurmond, a senator from South Carolina at that time, even sent a cable to the USAID mission in Panama asking about the boat. Bob and Irving Tragen, the mission director, wrote a reply cable to Thurmond explaining that the boat belonged to Bob and his credit union and was in no way intended for Torrijos' use.

Q: Torrijos did leave Panama, some point after you left, I think. Or maybe he was killed.

MATHIA: Right, right. He never used our boat. He died when a plane he was in crashed close to Penonome, Panama. He was only fifty-two. People at the mission jokingly said we should name our boat *El General*.

Q: Did you?

MATHIA: No, but we did name the boat *Ted & Alice* since we were Bob and Carol and when we were dating, that movie, *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* was a very popular movie.

When people first met us, many would say, You're Bob and Carol. So, where's Ted and Alice? We could then answer, "They're down at the dock."

Q: So, explain the geography. So there's the Panama Canal, which had locks, and then there's a lake that's part of—well the canal was built to kind of connect to the Gatun?

MATHIA: Gatun Lake? Yes, when we would take the boat out, we kept it on Gatun Lake. We would be out in the middle of the lake, and you could see big ships passing by that were going to transit the locks. Once I was in the boat making lunch for everybody else who were out in the water. A big boat was going by but I couldn't see it. It made some big waves, and our boat started rocking like crazy. I started screaming because all of the food was falling off the counter and I didn't know what was causing the boat to rock. Everybody else was laughing because they knew what was causing it.

Q: Were you the only one in the mission that you knew of that had a boat?

MATHIA: No, there were other people that had boats, but a lot of them took theirs out on the ocean. We took ours out on the ocean one time. Bob didn't like it because he had to wash it off really well to get all the salt off. He also said the boat felt awfully small out in the big ocean, and he preferred being on the lake with it.

In fact, there was an awful accident for one man that had a boat. He stored the gas for his boat in his laundry room in their apartment. The water heater was next to where he stored the gas. It started a fire, and he got badly burned.

Q: Oh no.

MATHIA: I know they sent him to Texas—to the burn unit in Texas—because of that.

Q: Oh, how terrible.

MATHIA: It was an accident.

Q: And then there's some nice beaches, an island. I imagine it wasn't as developed as it is now, but there's one island which had a nice resort, even thirty years ago, it's called Cantadora? Did you go there much?

MATHIA: We never went, no. We just always stayed on Gatun Lake when we went out. We didn't go to any of them.

Q: I think you had another exciting hospital stay when you were in Panama.

MATHIA: Yes, I decided that I was going to have my tubes tied, so we made plans for that. I was told that when I checked in we could bring my daughters up, and they could say goodbye to me there on the floor. The day I was supposed to have the operation we

went up to the floor—I think it was the fourth floor, I don't really remember for sure—but we got in the elevator and went up to the fourth floor. As the door opened it was Bob and I and the girls. There was a nurse that saw us and she shouted, "Get those kids off the floor! Kids aren't supposed to be on this floor!" I knew they told me otherwise, but we said our goodbyes on the elevator, and Bob and the girls then descended while I went to be checked in.

For my check in, a woman took me into a room and started to weigh me. The scale was the old-fashioned kind where they have to move the weights around. She was having a difficult time maneuvering it. When she finally figured out what I weighed, she proceeded to measure me. Then she measured me, using the rod attached to the scale. It read, "64," but she wrote six feet, four inches on the paper. I said, "No ma'am, I'm not six feet, four inches. That's 64 inches, so I'm five feet, four inches. You need to put five feet, four inches on the paper." Then she was taking me to my assigned room. There was a Mrs. Montero and a Mrs. Mathia on her sheet with two different room numbers. She took me to the room number that I could see on the sheet was for Mrs. Montero, and I said, "No, I'm Mrs. Mathia. You need to go to this room with me."

I was a little worried. Then right before the operation the doctor came in and said, "The way you're having your tubes tied [they were going to put Teflon rings on them] is a new procedure for Panamanians. We have some doctors from Panama City that want to observe the operation. Is that okay? Do you give your consent?" I said, "Sure, that's fine, I don't mind if they watch." I remember coming to after the operation and there were all these men around me and I thought, I guess they're observing this part now, too.

But the first thing I did after the operation was to feel my breasts and breathe a sigh of relief thinking, "They're still there, they did do the right operation, probably." I had been a little worried.

Q: Well, sounds like you handled that a lot calmer than my husband who at our last Spanish-speaking post got very, very agitated when they didn't check his—they hadn't really explained the operation to him, he wasn't—he just wasn't confident. And I think part of it was that it was in a different language. And it was very interesting, I said, "We can leave if you need to, but—"

MATHIA: Oh, wow.

Q: "—it's a good time to do it, I'm sure the doctor will speak English," but it made him very nervous.

MATHIA: Oh, yes. I'm sure it would—me too. I can remember the year I went to Spain, I went on a student ship, the *MS Aurelia* and the first or second night out, I was taking out my contacts, they were hard contacts. When I took out the left one, it scratched my eye. It hurt really bad. It felt like somebody was sticking a razor blade in my eye. I had to go to the ship's doctor, and he only spoke Italian—it was an Italian ship. It was very disturbing

to me to have to have an interpreter, you know, tell me things back and forth. I can see why he might have been nervous when it's not his own language.

Q: Sometimes there's exciting things that happen when we buy and sell cars. It's another adventure we have in these countries. Sometimes you can get a very good deal, a very inexpensive car that's being sold by somebody that's leaving, and a couple of times I bought cars that had, you know, twenty years of different diplomatic owners and there's a lot of interesting stories that come with that, including lack of maintenance. So, did you have a couple of cars like that in Panama?

MATHIA: Well, we did buy one car brand new there, and that was the car that Bob used. There was an American that was leaving Panama, and he was selling his Pinto that was then about four years old. We bought it and that was my car. He didn't tell us that the gas gauge was not calibrated correctly. One Thanksgiving, we were going to take the car in to have the oil changed because it was a good time to do it since the Panamanians were still working since they didn't get the day off. Early in the morning on Thanksgiving day, I followed Bob in his car to go to the place to have the oil changed.

I hadn't gone more than, probably three or four blocks, and the car stopped. I just took it to the side of the road, and I thought, "Well, I guess I'd better walk back home." We didn't have cell phones back then, so I walked back home and I was hoping that Bob would discover that I wasn't around. He finally realized I wasn't following him. He came back to the house and I told him what had happened. That's when we realized it had run out of gas even though it said it still had one-fourth of a tank. We never got it fixed. We just realized when it said one-half, it's really one-fourth and you'd probably better get some more gas. That was the first problem with it.

And then we took that car back to the States with us, and the first time we were going to go on a trip with it, Bob said, "You probably should get the tires rotated." Jenn and I took it to a K-Mart to have the tires rotated. We dropped it off in the garage, and then we went into the store and did some shopping while we were waiting. All of a sudden over the loudspeaker we heard, "Will Mrs. Mathia please come to the garage." I went back with Jenny, and the man said, "There's something wrong with your car." He said, "There's all kinds of rust on the undercarriage. I've never seen a car this rusty." I replied, "We lived in Panama for two years and this car was there for four years before, so it's had six years of really humid and salty air. I'm sure that's why it's all rusty. So, it's nothing to worry about. That's just a natural thing for this car." And he said, "I know but I've never seen one this bad. I just really wondered about how this car could get this bad."

Q: Was he trying to tell you that it was dangerous to drive?

MATHIA: No, he didn't. He did not try to convince me that I had to have anything done. I think he was just concerned because he had never seen that rusted of an undercarriage. We never had any problems with that part.

Q: So, the Ford Pintos are a pretty famous case of a car that shouldn't have been on the road.

MATHIA: That's right.

Q: Did you have any problems—

MATHIA: The gas tank was in a bad position so that in a car wreck it could—if you hit it, start a fire. We were aware that there was going to be a recall to put a shield around the tank. We decided I would just use that car with me in the front seat. Once the recall was fixed, I could then take the girls with me. But one Friday evening I was going to go get some carry-out food. I told Bob I'd use the Pinto, and Michelle asked if she could go along. Bob and I had talked about using the Pinto until the recall by only using the front seat. We wouldn't put anybody in the back seat until after the recall.

Michelle came with me. Back then they didn't have rules about children under eight not riding in the front seat. So, she was sitting in the front seat with me with her seatbelt on. As I started driving, she said, "Well, Mommy, when are we gonna blow up?" and I said, "What do you mean, 'When are we gonna blow up?'" And she said, "Daddy said that this car can blow up." I explained the whole thing to her, "It can only blow up if we get hit from the back end and it was a crash that could start a fire, but chances of that happening aren't very big. Also, we're in the front seat, so that if that happened, we wouldn't be as bad, you know, we wouldn't be damaged." She answered, "Okay." She just misunderstood and thought that her mother would put her in a car that would blow up!

Q: Well, it was—I think it was probably—it wasn't as common, but I think it was still a pretty dangerous thing that could have been fixed with like a ten-dollar part, I think.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: It was a famous ethics case, you know, with the car.

MATHIA: Yes, yes it was.

Q: But I think you described in one of the essays you wrote that—in Panama, it got so hot and humid, that pieces of the car would fall off. Is that right?

MATHIA: No, the heat and humidity ruined a Radio Flier wagon that we had gotten in Honduras and brought with us to Panama. Stokely Van Camp had a deal where if you sent in one hundred labels, they would send you a wagon. We did but close to the time when the offer was going to expire, we still did not have one hundred labels. We had to take the labels off of a few of our pork and beans cans that were still full, so we had enough to send in. Stokely Van Camp sent us a really nice Radio Flier wagon through the APO [Army Postal Office], and we took it with us to Panama.

While we were in Panama, we decided we were going to get the girls a sandbox in addition to their other outdoor play toys. We told some friends, and one of them told us they could get us some beach sand for the sandbox. She brought it before we had the sandbox, so we stored it in the wagon. By the time [only two weeks or less] we took the sand out of the wagon to put it in the sandbox, the wagon was all rusted caused by the salt in the beach sand.

The Pinto itself we had problems with because it was just getting old. One time I was opening up the car, the driver's side, to get out, and the handle came off in my hand. That's when I realized the handle was made of plastic, not metal. So, it broke and I had to get a new one. The steering wheel was a metal rod, encased in plastic. I think because of the heat, the plastic became brittle and pieces would break off as I was driving. In the end it was mostly a metal rod that would be hot to the touch on a warm summer's day.

Luis and Erlinda came to visit us the first summer that we were in Reston, Virginia. We planned to go with them to Knoxville, Tennessee for a World's Fair. Luis was going to drive the Pinto with his wife and two sons while we took our station wagon with our two daughters. He had to contend with the steering wheel that was coming apart. He complained about it quite a bit. When we came back from the World's Fair, they were still with us for a while longer. It was close to my birthday, and Luis bought me a new steering wheel as a birthday gift. We never got around to installing it. Instead, when we sold the car, we advertised that it came with a new steering wheel that the new owner could install. I was so used to the metal rod, I didn't mind not having a good steering wheel.

Q: You guys sounded like you were pretty comfortable with living a little rustically.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: It didn't sound like—you know, very often for American families overseas, all of those kinds of things are very upsetting every time. But those are usually the people that maybe don't decide to stay living overseas in rustic conditions.

MATHIA: Yes. It just comes with the territory. Especially with USAID because you only get third-world posts. You just get used to it.

Q: How did the size of the mission, the AID mission in Panama compare to Honduras?

MATHIA: I think it was bigger, but I don't really know for sure.

Q: Were you more—was it more cohesive? Did the families stick together more than they did in Honduras?

MATHIA: I think maybe since Honduras was a much smaller city, that it was more cohesive in Honduras than it was in Panama. In Panama there were so many other

Americans and there was the Canal Zone, so a lot of our friends were not even mission people. I took Michelle for swimming lessons at The YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] that was in the Canal Zone, and I met some mothers there. One was the wife of a doctor who was interning at the Gorgas Hospital. We became very good friends. They were living in the Canal Zone. They had a son and a daughter. The daughter was adopted from Korea. One day we got to talking, and I realized that her daughter was adopted from an orphanage in which Bob did volunteer work while he was stationed in Korea for his military service. We had them over for dinner, and Bob showed them slides of the orphanage that she came from. It was just very serendipitous that that happened. We did things with mission people, but then also with other people there.

Q: And there were no demands to bake cookies, or wear gloves, or anything old fashioned?

MATHIA: No, I didn't get in trouble there. Those requirements no longer existed.

Q: Were a lot of your college spouses—were they usually at home? And were you an outlier in working?

MATHIA: I think most of them still did not work outside the home yet.

Q: Yes, but there was no stigma involved in working either.

MATHIA: No, not like it was in Honduras. There was only one other woman when we were in Honduras that worked, and she worked at the college, the University of Honduras. When we first got there, I didn't want to have a maid, so we didn't have one. Luis' sister had married an American. They were living in Maryland while stationed in DC. One time when we were visiting them, she happened to mention, "You know, you were the talk of the town when we were in Tegucigalpa because you made all the other wives look bad. You didn't have a maid, you worked outside the home, and you didn't spend your days playing bridge." I said, "It's a good thing I didn't realize it at the time because I would have felt bad about it." But I was oblivious to the fact that they were not happy with me.

Q: Was it just financial, not having a maid? Or was there something—

MATHIA: No, we chose not to since we hadn't even been married a year when we were first there. I told Bob I didn't want somebody else living in my house, that I wanted our privacy. Once I got pregnant with Michelle, I had to have a maid/nanny. If we wanted to go anywhere, to do anything outside of our home without taking Michelle, we would have needed a babysitter. Getting a babysitter wasn't possible in Honduras, so we had to hire help.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: Plus, if I worked, I would need someone to take care of her.

Q: Some people, not that many, but some people decide not to do it with kids because they can see the effect on the kids not, you know, thinking that somebody's going to be picking up after them or spoiling them. And I've had friends who have tried really hard to get the house keepers and the nannies—I have too—to not spoil them too much, but it's really hard, because of the different cultures, it's a very loving way to treat them.

MATHIA: Right. When we were in Honduras and then Panama, the girls were too young to learn this. Then Bob was stationed in DC when they were three and five, so I started giving them easy chores to do. We moved to Pakistan when they were eight and ten. While we were there, they were supposed to keep their own room clean and make their beds themselves. I told the servant that if their room [they shared a bedroom] was a mess, he should neither dust nor mop in it. Also, he was not to make their beds. They were very bad about keeping their room messy. One summer break the first thing they had to do after getting dressed and eating breakfast was go to their room to work on cleaning it up. I sat in the doorway, instructing them on how to straighten up the mess. We did this for twenty minutes each morning until the room was back in good shape. I told them, "Someday you're going to be in the States where we don't have servants and someday you're going to be in college and you need to know how to do these types of things."

I cannot remember what post I was in, but I was visiting at a friend's house and one of her children was there. There was a servant busy cleaning the house. The son of the woman I was visiting called the servant over and told her he wanted her to go fetch him a soda. The maid had to stop her work to serve that boy. This greatly disturbed me, and I thought to myself, My children will never do that!

Q: So—

MATHIA: Some servants would be hard to convince. In Pakistan I had to repeatedly remind Abdul not to clean the girls' room since it was so messy.

Q: Just out of love, I think.

MATHIA: Oh, yes. I'm sure Abdul thought I was being mean to them.

Q: They're helping.

MATHIA: Yes. I remember one time I came home from teaching when we were in Honduras, and the maid said to me, "You know, Michelle is so smart. Whenever you give her something to eat, she knows to eat it." And I said, "No, did you ever notice that whenever you give her anything, she puts it in her mouth, and if it happens to dissolve, she'll swallow it. So, she's not really that smart." And the maid looked at me like, "Oh, I thought Michelle was really smart, I wish you wouldn't say that about her."

Q: When I lived in Honduras, I had a housekeeper, and I had brought a nanny with me, so she was a good cook. But I tried to get the housekeeper to do some cooking, and it was not a very happy result. And I—

MATHIA: Did you bring the nanny from the States?

Q: I did. Well—yes, what had happened was my first tour had been in Russia, and I had met this Philippine nanny and we—when my husband was visiting at the end of the tour, he talked her into coming back with us. And she was with us for eleven years, and she came to Honduras. I was only home for two years when the opportunity to go to Honduras came up. He had some trouble teaching her to drive—it took a while—but she was very good.

MATHIA: Where was she from originally?

Q: Philippines.

MATHIA: Philippines.

Q: Yes, but she was a very, very good cook. We had brought her with us and there was a little bit of rivalry between the servants, a little bit uncomfortable.

MATHIA: Yes, I'm sure. Our first maid in Honduras was also a very good cook. We were lucky to find her. But she ended up getting pregnant and stopped working for us after the baby came. We had been on home leave and arrived back in Honduras a day earlier than she expected us to get there. We had been gone over a month and upon our arrival, she ran up to our bedroom to put clean sheets on the bed. I thought it odd that she had waited until then to do so. Shortly after our being back, she announced that she was pregnant, so I put two and two together and realized she and the prospective "father" must have conceived the baby in our bed. Shortly after that our pet Dalmatian, Mancha, got pregnant and ended up having nine puppies. Then I discovered I was pregnant with our second child. I told Bob, "This certainly is a fertile house!"

Q: But I tried to have the housekeeper cook, and it was a very unhappy result. I realized later, that very often they don't have experience—like she told me when she got a refrigerator or a stove for the first time. They don't have a lot of the—

MATHIA: Oh, so she didn't have the opportunity to learn because she had no experience with a refrigerator or our kind of stove.

Q: She didn't have a lot of—she didn't have much of a kitchen.

MATHIA: Right.

Q: So, she never really—even though she had raised six kids, she really hadn't, you know, cooked much of the type we were used to.

MATHIA: And was it the Philippine lady that was teaching her how to cook too, or were you?

Q: No, I didn't teach her. I just asked her to make a few things and then I realized—because I just assumed she could cook. Right? She had a family, six kids, you know. But—

MATHIA: Our first maid did a lot of the cooking. She was a very good cook.

Q: Yeah. So, but Josie was with us, so she just did the cooking for me and then I guess I would cater. I don't remember actually entertaining too much in the house. But, it was a wakeup call in that a lot of the time we just make assumptions about, you know—

MATHIA: Right.

Q: —the people who are going to be working as your housekeeper come from pretty humble backgrounds and—

MATHIA: Yes, I remember some people telling me some stories they had with servants in Honduras. One friend said that she asked the servant to set the table. There was a stick of butter, and she stuck it vertically rather than horizontally on the butter plate because I guess she'd never seen stick butter, so she had no idea. And another friend told me that one time she was having the maid vacuum for the first time, but when she finished, it still wasn't clean. She couldn't understand why. She finally realized it was because the maid didn't know that she had to plug the vacuum in to make it work. If they are coming really from the *campo* (countryside), and they really haven't experienced any of that, they just don't know.

Q: Right, or maybe she was good at being a housekeeper but not necessarily as a cook.

MATHIA: Right, right.

Q: But you really have to, you know, step back some of your assumptions. I was remembering that, though my kids went to a different school, my house in Honduras had been near the American school. And it was a big campus, so we used to put the little bicycles in the car and ride over there to have the kids ride around—ride their bikes there. Because riding on the street wasn't done, and it was a hilly town anyway. But it was also a time of great danger where a lot of people—there were a lot of kids and young people that were being kidnapped at the time.

MATHIA: When we were there, we were lucky because it was safe then. But one of the things that I remember about teaching at the American school in Honduras was that when

I was pregnant with Michelle, so many times my female students would say, "What do you want? A boy or a girl? You want a boy, don't you?" And I'd say, "No, I just want a healthy baby. It doesn't matter whether it's a boy or a girl."

On the last day of school before I was going to go back to the States to have Michelle, these four Honduran girls came with a present for me that was for Michelle. It was a little stuffed bunny that Michelle really ended up liking. [She still has it with her in Australia.] We were talking, and they said the same thing to me, "You hope you have a boy, don't you?" And I said, "No, I just want a healthy baby." They said, "But boys are better," and I said, "Do you realize that you're saying boys are better, and you're a girl? Do you really think boys are better?" And they looked at me as if they'd never thought of that before. They'd always been taught boys were better, they believed it, and they had never really thought about it. They were shocked when I said, "How can you say boys are better when you're a girl?" It had never entered their mind.

Q: In either Honduras or Panama, did you get involved in any charitable organizations? There was in Honduras, there were some Franciscans that used to do some food packing and things like that for the poor. They were up near—they were up closer to the air base, I think.

MATHIA: No, not that I remember.

Q: So you had planned on staying in Panama a while and things were going very well with your career. You were—I think I read in one of your essays that not only were you teaching ESL, but you might have started teaching ESL teachers?

MATHIA: Yes, the head of the ESL department at the Canal Zone College, Marie Rosenwasser, wanted to teach some Panamanians at the Instituto Panamericano (Pan-American Institute) in Panama City. The institute had asked her if she could come and give some ESL pedagogy. She asked me if I would go with her and help. We put together a whole day's conference where we taught them different things. I did get to do that, but it was only a one-time thing. I did feel honored that she asked me, of all teachers, "Would you come and help me?" So, I did.

Q: Very good.

MATHIA: I did feel very successful in my career there. Then we had to leave sooner than planned.

Q: Sooner than planned?

MATHIA: Yes, sooner than planned. We had always wanted to stay in a post as long as possible, so it would seem more like home for the children. We had planned on staying longer than that, but somebody from Washington came to visit. We had known him and his wife in Honduras. He asked me all kinds of questions about Panama. He had two girls

of his own, and he asked me about day care and other questions about living in Panama. We took him out on our boat where he asked me all these questions. I told him about the really good nursery school that Michelle had gone to and how much I liked it. I was giving him all this advice, not knowing that he was planning on coming and taking Bob's place. They switched positions. Bob went to DC and took his position, and vice versa. While doing this interviewing I have been reading some of the other ADST interviews. One I read was by this man's wife. She became an AID employee, and she and her husband were some of the first tandem couples that AID hired. Upon reading her interview I realized that Panama was the first post they went to as a tandem couple. The man was able to fill Bob's position and the wife was able to fill a position in the education department that was vacant.

Q: But this time he didn't have a choice, he was just told to do it?

MATHIA: Yes, he didn't fill out a wish-list or anything. We were just told that we were going to do this. He was reminded that he had been out of country for seven years, so it would be a good idea to have a DC posting.

Q: Okay. So, that was 1978?

MATHIA: Yes. 1978.

Q: And you came back to Washington, and you had not really lived there before much?

MATHIA: No, I had never lived there. When we were in Honduras and Michelle was a baby, we came back to the States and stayed in the DC area to look for a house because we knew that eventually we would be stationed there. We did buy one before it was even done being constructed. Once it was finished, we rented it out so that we could make the payments by having it rented out.

Q: So, where was that? Where was the house?

MATHIA: In Reston, Virginia.

Q: Oh, that's right.

MATHIA: One of the first planned cities.

Q: Reston is just a suburb now, but at the time it was considered very far away.

MATHIA: My husband used to commute, but now they don't probably even see it as a commute because it's considered so close. When he commuted, there was the incident of a plane crashing into a bridge that Bob crossed on his commute to DC. It was winter. The plane had been de-iced before takeoff, but it had to wait so long on the tarmac before

takeoff that its wings once again iced up. It ended up crashing into the bridge shortly after takeoff.

Q: Fourteenth Street Bridge?

MATHIA: Yes, the Fourteenth Street Bridge. I knew that Bob crossed that bridge going to and coming back from work. I saw it on TV. He wasn't home yet when I saw the news of the crash on TV. They showed cars on the bridge damaged during the crash. They showed a glove lying on the ground next to a damaged car. I remember thinking, "Bob doesn't have a glove like that. Thank goodness." I was really worried that he was one of the people that had gotten hit. Finally, he arrived home hours later. He said it was because they had to take a different route due to the crash. It was a scary moment before cell phones and instant communication.

Q: So, you came back into your house. So, this is another element or adventure of Foreign Service life, renting out your house when you don't know how long you're going to be away.

MATHIA: Right.

Q: Many diplomats have a diplomatic clause in the rent agreement and you had to call the family on it, and it was difficult, right?

MATHIA: Right, right. We let the renter know well in advance of our return. We had rented to a couple, but they had gotten divorced while we were renting to them, so the husband was the only one left in our house. We let him know we were coming back and gave him a date as to when he had to be out of the house. Unfortunately, he was not out by the designated time. We had to stay in a hotel in DC until he left. He finally left, but he stored quite a bit of his furniture in our garage. It was full, so full, we were unable to park our car in the garage.

We asked the rental agent what to do, and she said, "I'll send him a letter saying that he has to have those items out by a certain time or they are going to the dump." And that upset me because there were some really nice things there. The renter did not come in time, so his items were sent to the dump. A few days later, he showed up. We heard his car and saw that he was there. He didn't come to the door. Instead, he went to the garage and looked inside. He saw that it was empty of his things and our car was in it. He returned to his car and drove away. We had done what we legally were allowed to do, but I felt bad for him.

Q: So, how old were your kids when you arrived?

MATHIA: Michelle was almost five and Jenny was almost three. Michelle went to kindergarten the first fall that we were back.

Q: So, I'm trying to think. My kids came back from an overseas tour at that same age—exact same age. But I think at that age it was okay. I think it was the next move when they came back in the middle of elementary school or the end of elementary school and they thought they were hot stuff. And the other kids didn't agree.

MATHIA: They were too young to realize because they hadn't really been in school.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: The day that we left Panama to come back to the States was the day that Carter was coming into Panama to formally sign the treaty to give the Canal Zone back to the Panamanians. Since we left early in the morning and he was coming in later in the day, there was bunting and other decorations up in the airport to welcome Carter later in the day. Our daughters were very young at the time, so I told them, "See, they know that an important family is leaving today, so they decorated it for us."

Q: And they believed you.

MATHIA: They believed me, yes, they were young enough to believe me. We brought the Pinto back with us. We had Panamanian plates on it for quite a while before we went to the DMV [Department of Motor Vehicles] and got new plates for it. The day that we went, we took the girls with us—and that's another thing—after having been overseas with my children, only overseas, I was used to just leaving the house whenever I wanted because there was always a maid there to take care of them. There were a couple times when we were first in DC that we got in the car, Bob and I, to go somewhere and we started backing out and we realized, "Oh no, we can't leave the house. We have to get the kids with us because we don't—"

There were also other things we forgot to do such as leaving the windows open and leaving the house. A couple times it rained while we were gone, and we had a water mess to clean up when we got back. We were just used to having servants to do all that, and we had to really retrain ourselves. We were back in the States where we had to do those things ourselves.

Q: Cut your own grass and—

MATHIA: Right. In fact, I used to always say, "The real hardship post is DC. It's not the other posts. It's DC."

Q: That's right. A lot more expensive, right?

MATHIA: Right.

Q: So, especially for Latin America.

MATHIA: Yes. But getting back to the Pinto. We had to go to the DMV to get our new plates for it, our Virginia plates. We chose to go when there were these two elderly ladies working there. We gave them our Panamanian plates and they said, Oh, you were in Panama. I answered, "Yes, and we need to get Virginia plates. They were talking to the girls, and one of them said, "Were you born in Panama?" Michelle answered, "No, I was made in Honduras, but produced in the United States. But Jenny was made and produced in Honduras." We had always jokingly said that to them, not knowing that they would ever repeat it. I was so embarrassed. The ladies giggled, and Michelle said, "What's so funny?" She didn't think it was something funny at all. Out of mouths of babes, right?

Q: Right. I used to have, you know, little euphemisms. I would say, "Oh, you have a bad sniffle today," so then my son would go to school and say, "I just didn't do my homework because my sniffle was so bad." So, you never quite know what's going to come out of their mouths. So, how long were you in Reston at this point?

MATHIA: We were there for five years.

Q: And was Bob working with AID?

MATHIA: He was working with AID for the first two years. Then circumstances with Michelle required him to change jobs.

Michelle would come home from kindergarten and complain about what was happening in school. She didn't like it, and she would complain. I found out that she was in the getting ready to read program. Back then they didn't push you as much as they do now about reading readiness. But they saw that she knew the alphabet, so they put her in a special group where they were advancing their reading readiness. She was not happy in that group. The main reason she knew the alphabet was that when we were in Panama, she went to a really good nursery school that was in the Zone. It was run by this beautiful Jewish woman that believed that children should learn to be responsible for themselves.

She started out the school day by meeting at the Y [YMCA] where they would go swimming for the first hour. They would play in the water, and then they would walk from the Y to the nursery school, which was very close by. I told her teacher, Leah Barkowitz, "I'm very happy that you do that. Michelle really enjoys it." She told me she had a special reason for doing so. The majority of her students were children that were raised by nannies. They didn't know how to dress or undress themselves. Her goal by the end of the year was that the children could do so because they didn't have their nannies around to do it for them.

Once they got to the nursery school, the first thing that she had them do was sing the alphabet song. She had the alphabet taped across one of the walls, and a child would get chosen each day to pick out a stuffed toy and use it to point to the letters of the alphabet as the other children sang it. In this way Michelle learned the alphabet. That's why she was put in the getting ready to read program. They thought that she was advanced. But

she was having a hard time, so I finally went to the kindergarten and asked them to remove her from the special class. I told them I did not think she was ready for the special program, and it was just frustrating her.

They did. Then the next inkling I had that she was having problems was when she joined the Bluebirds [like Brownies but for Camp Fire Girls]. We had a meeting at one of the Bluebird leader's houses. All the little girls were sitting around with their mothers when we were told that they were going to have to memorize the Bluebird wish. The leader passed it out and asked that we all read it together for the first time. I then noticed the other little girls were reading, but Michelle wasn't reading. She was stumbling with it. That's when I first realized, "She's not reading." And then she came home from school one time, very upset because the kids got to take turns reading the lunch menu over the loudspeaker, and it was going to be her turn. She didn't want to do it, and I realized it was because she had difficulty reading it.

I convinced her to practice it with me, so that when her day came, she would know it well enough to be able to read it. After that her second grade teacher called me in to talk to me about Michelle. She told me that she thought Michelle was a slow learner. I said, "That's a euphemism for retarded, and I don't think my daughter's retarded because she seems smart in many ways. But I realize, too, she's not reading." That's when her teacher told me about PL-94-142, the public law that children are supposed to be given help if they need it. She said according to that law, the school could test her to see if she would be eligible for extra help. But she told me that from experience she knew that such a request would take a long time for the school system to answer. She advised me and Bob to have her tested at our own expense to speed up the process.

Bob and I decided to do so. We were given the names of some psychologists who could test her. Before she got tested, we had a meeting where we answered questions regarding Michelle. At the meeting I told them that I had been discussing this with Michelle, that she was going to have these tests. She kept telling me, "It's because I'm stupid," and I'd say, "No Michelle, it's not because you're stupid, it's because you learn differently and they're going to find out what's the best way for you to learn so that we can help you." She was not looking forward to the testing. The psychologist asked me more questions about Michelle. I don't know why, but I mentioned that she loved the color pink. She was really into pastel colors and especially pink. [Currently, she's an architect and she likes black, but pink was her thing back then.] The day I took her in for the first day of testing, the psychologist met us, and she was wearing a pink dress. I appreciatively thought, "She really listened and she knew that Michelle was nervous and she did this. This was very, very nice of her to do that."

She had her first day of testing, and on the way home in the car from that first day, Michelle said, "I really liked that. When's the next time I get to go and do that?" The psychologist did a very good job of helping her. She had her second day of testing. Then the psychologists met with Bob and me once again. That's when they explained about her

dyslexia. I thought, "Here I'm a trained teacher, and I never knew anything about there being such a thing as dyslexia," but I started learning about it after that.

She was then put into the special ed classes. She was called out of her class, one hour a day, and it did help her. We had meetings with the special ed teacher regularly, and at one of those meetings, Bob asked, "How is Michelle doing? Do you think she could work on her own and she could live overseas where she wouldn't have this extra help?" Bob had quit AID when we found out that she had dyslexia. He found another job working for the Department of Agriculture in Farmers Home Administration [FHA] since he knew that, from experience, that the schools overseas did not have any kind of special ed programs which she needed. [They do now, by the way.] The teacher told him that she was doing very well with the special ed help but that I helped her a lot too, and she thought that with my help and how well she had learned to compensate already that she would be okay. So, Bob re-applied for employment with USAID, and we were assigned to Pakistan.

Q: Oh, that's great. Yes, my son also—the testing I ended up doing for my kids was a little later. Third grade for one—or second grade for one—and fifth grade for the other. And I had to push for the testing. But, you know, the State Department at that time had some funding for that. They had a program that—

MATHIA: Were you in the States when you had them tested, then?

Q: Well, the first one I was stationed in Honduras for my older son, he was nine—had just turned nine. And I came back for the summer—I had taken R&R [rest and relaxation], but the kids had been there. And I had put him into a gifted program and he couldn't—he was very verbal but he couldn't write. And so, it just didn't feel right and it was hard to get appointments with specialists on your own and fast. But I did. A friend helped me get an appointment with one guy—he was a really quirky guy—I don't think he had licenses, or he had revoked licenses, but he had him try to stand on one leg and things like that. And he looked at me like I was the worst mother in the world and he said, "How'd you let this happen?" So, it turned out he had sensory integration and balance issues, and that was affecting a lot of things, including writing because you're sitting on the chair trying to—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: But the younger one—and so that was done, and since I had a special—for speech I had a special allowance for him, and so we were able to use that funding for the trip and for the—trip back to Washington for this comprehensive testing. But the younger one we were here; it was when we came back from Honduras, and I was very concerned about his reading. And it took me a long time to get, you know, to really dial in on that it was reading problems. And we had some comprehensive testing done, but when it came to that it wasn't dyslexia, he literally had vision issues. One eye was 20/50 and it's really—you can see everything, but it's really hard to focus to read.

MATHIA: To focus on the letters, yes.

Q: And of course, he wouldn't wear the glasses because at that age he was starting to be stubborn. And so, we had to deal with that for a long time, and I had to start asking for accommodations—is it 504—something. Special plans, because he was very forgetful. The teachers had all been telling me he was—we had to cut all this out later, of the tape, but anyway he—the teachers were telling me that he had attention issues and things like that. And they wanted him to go on ADD [attention-deficit disorder] meds and I'm like, "No, no, no. This is the happiest little boy in the world, but I need some accommodation. I need an extra set of books at home so we don't have to worry about not remembering. I need you to sit him up front so he doesn't get distracted with his friends." And so, you know, but in order to do that we had to sign something that basically said he was retarded, you know. We're all looking at each other because it was hard to do, but he needed the accommodations and I just wasn't— Even the neurologist—they made me go to a neurologist—and, "There's nothing wrong," he said. "You know, just do the meds." And I'm like, "We're not doing meds with a kid like this." You know?

MATHIA: That was one of the things they suggested to me too that if Michelle wanted to take medicine, she could. And I thought, "Well, I'll ask Michelle." And I'm very fortunate that she was wise enough to say, "No, mom, I don't want to." I was glad that she didn't because I don't think that's good. It's quite something we mothers have to do to fight for our children.

Q: Oh, he really resented me for making him do the test thing too, you know.

MATHIA: Yes, but I still had to continue the fight. After they told us that she had dyslexia, I went back to the school system with the results. They had a meeting with me, and at the meeting one of the people said, "Well, we don't really think she needs any special training, because according to her testing she's so many levels above in math already and so many levels above in reading." And that's when I think something kicked in for me and I said, "Yes, but according to her IQ [intelligence quotient] she's this many years behind in math for what her IQ is and this many years behind in reading according to her IQ." They then said they would schedule another meeting for me where they would make the final decision.

The day came that I was supposed to go to the meeting. I was walking out the door to my car to drive to the meeting, and the phone rang. It was a man from the scheduled meeting. He said, "We've decided that your daughter can be in special ed. You don't need to come to the meeting." I think they realized, "This woman knows her rights and her daughter deserves to be in special ed." I know it's a lot more money for schools to have to do special ed with the kids, so they probably work hard to try to keep them out if they can. I feel sorry for people that do not have an education background and don't know how to fight for their kids. I think a lot of children probably need help, and they're not getting it because they don't know the system and they don't know how to use it to their advantage for their children.

Q: But I think also part of it is, as we come and go back and forth overseas, it's harder and harder to not let them drop through the cracks. Because they always want to drop through the cracks. They don't want to work on their math minutes harder or their— But one thing that happened for us is he, because of these vision issues, he—and just maybe the way his mind worked—he couldn't ever finish a math minute in a minute.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: And when it came time to do multiplication tables, I think I read that one of your girls had to really work hard. The nanny and I, we were just frantic. We didn't know how he would ever do the multiplication tables, but somehow, he was good at memorizing and that was nothing like trying to do a math minute. And that you do in kindergarten, first, and second grade. But fifth grade teaching, they were all telling me, "He's gifted in math." And I was like, "No, no, no, you mixed him up with the other one. No, no." He's gifted in math. So, I think—but, you know, he never really kept up, I guess, in a way that would have allowed him to take advantage of some of the gifted programs that others—my younger son—tha— So, that's a—

MATHIA: Did he finally wear the glasses then, so that he'd get better?

Q: No, he didn't. And I think later—

MATHIA: Did he know how to compensate?

Q: Right, and, you know, I had to really—you know he just didn't do well. He couldn't read fast enough and so, you know, he'd get into standardized testing, SATs [Scholastic Aptitude Test]—even SATs and he would just try to read the questions and figure it out instead of reading. And I said, "You're going to drown in college."

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: But, anyway, part of this back and forth, and if the kids are engaging, and they charm everybody out of it, and so we finally had to—at the end of this—we had to put him into a private high school for an extra year—two years—of private high school to kind of get him more ready for college.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: But we had in the State Department—I don't think, maybe AID is not as well-developed on this—but for State Department over time from the time my son—we first went to Honduras in 2001, where there was just one woman in the med part of State that had responsibility for okaying all these programs for everybody all over the world. So, then it became a very elaborate group.

MATHIA: That wasn't available back when Michelle had her problems.

Q: Right. Well, I—how are you doing on time?

MATHIA: I'm fine. It depends on you.

Q: Okay. Well, let's go for another fifteen minutes. So, we should cut out a lot of this when we get to your transcripts because this is about you, not about me. But I just wanted you to know that it's part of a pattern.

MATHIA: No, but I don't think you should cut it. I think it should stay in.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: That's my opinion.

Q: Well, you'll be in charge.

MATHIA: Interesting things, you know.

Q: You'll be in charge when you get the transcripts. So, anything else that you wanted to talk about during your time in Washington? How was your adjustment?

MATHIA: Oh, it was very hard at first because I didn't really want to leave Panama, because I felt very successful in my career and everything. I came back and tried and tried to get a job. I interviewed at this one school with the principal. During the interview, he said, "You know, we can hire a graduate straight from college in their first year of teaching, and you're with a master's degree and five years teaching experience." They pay teachers by the amount of education they have and the years of experience that they have, so they would have to start me out at a much higher salary than a beginning teacher. I thought, He's saying, "Volunteer to go back to a level one, first year salary," but I'm not going to do that, I'm just not going to do that.

Then I interviewed at another place that was in a sketchy part of town, and as I went in for the interview there was graffiti on the walls of the school. I walked into the reception area to let them know that I had an appointment with the principal to interview for a job. I saw the sofa that they had me wait on had been slashed, and I thought, "Hm, they haven't even replaced it?" I went into the interview, and he asked me, "What would you do if the police came in and asked for one of your students while you were teaching?" I answered the question, but I thought, "I don't think I'm going to do well in this interview. I just don't want to because I don't want this job. I don't think I want to teach at this school."

Anyway, I could not get a job teaching. I just tried and just could not get one. Bob said, "Well, you're going to have to probably reinvent yourself." So, I went back to Northern Virginia Community College and started work on a degree in accounting. And then, in

the meantime, I got a phone call from another campus of Northern Virginia Community College. They needed a Spanish teacher. They must have lost their Spanish teacher all of a sudden. I had put in resumes everywhere. Mine must have been the last one in, so that it was the first one out. They saw it and called me and I ended up getting a job teaching at the Manassas campus, teaching Spanish at the Manassas campus. I taught there and I took classes at the Loudoun Campus—the accounting classes at the Loudoun campus. [By the way, Northern Virginia Community College is where First Lady, Dr. Jill Biden, teaches.]

I was always reading the want ads in the paper, and I saw there was a job at the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance [AAHPERD]. AAPHERD was located in Reston. They wanted someone to do accounts receivable. I thought, "I could use some of the accounting I've learned. I'll apply for this job. It's full-time. It will pay a lot better than just this part time work I'm doing." I applied, and got the job. I kept reading the want ads and saw a job for a corporation called COMEX. They sold video equipment, mainly to Central and South America, and they wanted somebody to do accounts receivable, payable, and bank reconciliations. And knowing some Spanish would be good. I thought, "This is the job I want. This is the job that uses all my skills." I applied for that, and I got that job.

It turned out that the company was less than honest in its handling of different situations, and they were asking me to fudge some records. I kept refusing and finally, one day, I came into the office and before I could even take my coat off, the vice president said, "I want to see you in my office." I knew the same thing was going to happen that was happening before. He would say, "Why won't you change these invoices?" And I would answer, "Because I don't think it's legal. If you think it's right, you change them." He said, "That's not my job, it's your job." I answered, "But I don't think it's right, so if you want them changed, you change them." I thought, "I've been through this conversation so many times." I left his office, put my coat back on and left the building. I drove back home and called Bob and said, "I just quit the job. Because I just can't do it anymore. It's just—they're harassing me too much." And then he talked to an AID lawyer at the State Department, and they agreed it was probably best that I quit.

So, I did. Fortunately, at the company that I had worked for before, AAHPERD, I had made friends with a coworker. She knew what had happened and told them. AAHPERD had an opening in another department then—it wasn't accounts receivable—it was something I could do that was more secretarial. They offered me the job, and I went back and worked there.

Q: Good. And then you were—so you were two-income? Well, you were both working, and you were juggling the kids and you didn't have anybody in the house with you, so, just a little. But you guys figured it out.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: Alright. Anything else notable? How did it come up that you were then going to go to Pakistan?

MATHIA: Once Bob was told that it would be okay for Michelle to be in schools overseas—that they thought she would do okay—he put the feelers out that he was interested in being in USAID again. The very first mission to respond was Pakistan, and he accepted. After his acceptance, Costa Rica offered him a position. I told Bob, "You need to take the position in Costa Rica. That'd be much better for me. I know Spanish. I think Costa Rica could be a really good post for us. We've already visited there, and we really liked it." He told me he couldn't do it. He said, "I have to earn my way back into AID. I can't tell these people that I'm not going to go to Pakistan, I've got a better offer. I can't do that." I was really reluctant to go to Pakistan. But, in hindsight it was one of the best posts we ever had. We really, really liked it.

Q: Good. So, we'll cover that next time, and I am dying to hear all about it. What year was it that you went to Pakistan, do you remember?

MATHIA: Eighty-three. We were there from '83 to '89.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: That was the post we were in for the longest time.

Q: Okay, well I'll have to look back at my notes, because I've interviewed an AID person who spent a lot of time in South Asia and a woman named Beth Jones, a state department officer who considered—

MATHIA: I'm all mixed up in your—

Q: So, I'll just go back and look and see what dates that they were there. So, anyway, I'm going to stop the recording now. But I do want to thank you, we have been covering a lot of these lifestyle issues that affect families so much, and the officers too and it's not something that people really think about when they think about the career. They don't realize the cost or the complications or the, you know—for the families. So, I think it's a nice thing. But also, the opportunities, so—

MATHIA: Right. That's much more important, I think.

Q: Okay. Good afternoon, it's July 7, 2021, and we're continuing our conversation with Carol Mathia. And so, Carol, I think we're in the '80s and you're leaving Washington and you're going to a—what turned out to be one of your longest tours—in Pakistan. Is that right?

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: So, why don't you go ahead, and I know that it was—at that time Pakistan was a fascinating place, there was a lot going on next door in Afghanistan there was a longstanding aid mission. And people have described living there in the—earlier too—in the '70s, '80s, '60s, have described it as being really a fascinating tour. But, really wonderful for families so—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: So, why don't you go ahead and set the scene for us.

MATHIA: Okay. At first, I was very reluctant to go. We were going back into the Foreign Service, and I was used to being in Latin American, and I knew Spanish, no Urdu, and was not looking forward to going.

Q: You. I'm sorry, you froze a little. You said you knew Spanish.

MATHIA: Yes, and so I really would rather have gone to another posting in Latin America. But then in hindsight I'm very glad that we got this post. I think it was really good for our daughters to be there at that time. It gave them a really good cultural experience and experiences with kids from all over the world. It made them learn to be very tolerant women, and it made them learn to be very happy that they were U.S. citizens when they saw how women were treated in other parts of the world. It made them be very tolerant of other cultures.

When we went there, I wanted to try to get a job teaching as I had at our other posts. I interviewed for a job at the International School of Islamabad [ISI]. By the way, it is now referred to as IS of I because of the current political implications of "ISI." It's a K-12 school. I was able to get a job teaching ESL to middle schoolers. There were only four classes, so I was told that if I wanted to be full-time, I'd have to also teach a typing class. It was with old, black, manual typewriters, and the book that we used for our timed typings was so old that a selection said, "When man someday lands on the moon—"

That's what we used, and the typewriters were always breaking down. It wasn't pleasant, but I only had to teach typing for one year. What is funny is that in high school I got all As and Bs, except for one C, and that was in typing because typing just came hard for me. If somebody at that time said, "Someday you're going to be teaching typing, and it will be in Pakistan," I would have thought, You're out of your mind, that's the strangest thing I've ever heard. But I ended up doing that. A couple years later—we were there five and a half years, and I taught the whole time—they asked me to teach typing again. They didn't have someone to teach it, and I said, "Oh, I will not teach typing again. Those machines are horrible, and nobody types on typewriters anymore. That's really silly. I'll teach keyboarding and word processing on computers, though." They agreed to my conditions, so I once again taught typing.

It was an interesting situation because I taught in a classroom that had a plywood partition down the middle. We had computers on both sides. On one side the teacher, Doris Mohr, was teaching programming. On my side, I was teaching keyboarding/word processing. We would have electrical outages once in a while during class. When we had them, it was interesting to see how each class felt about them. Doris' students who were programming would get very upset because they hadn't saved as they were going along, and they'd lost all of the programming that they'd been doing. They would be very upset. Some would even swear. On the other hand, my students would be very happy and go, "Yay, yay! No timed writing today!"

I was very lucky in that whatever I taught, I was given free reign. When they had me teach ESL, they really didn't have any materials for me to use. I had to find my own and develop the curriculum for the classes. I was told that the Binational Center might have some books that would be useful. I visited there, and they supplied me with some very good textbooks that I found to be very useful. One of them was called, *Developing Writing*. The book had twenty chapters. Each chapter started with a reading about U.S. customs or places in the U.S. Sometimes the reading was in the form of a dialogue. Each reading was followed by grammar and mechanics lessons based on the chapter reading. Exercises were presented with each lesson. Once we were done with a chapter and all its exercises, I developed a chapter test to see how well the students had integrated the lesson. I used the book and tests I developed for a few years when I realized the tests I had developed to go along with the chapters might be valuable to other teachers who were using *Developing Writing*. I sent a copy of them to the English Language Programs Division of the U.S. Information Agency in Washington, DC. They decided to publish it as *Chapter Tests for Developing Writing* by Carol A. Mathia. I was pleasantly surprised to see that they put a nice "About the Author of the Tests" blurb on the first page of the booklet.

Sometimes teaching ESL was really a challenge. One year I had a class of only four Japanese students. They had virtually zero English, so I was starting from scratch with them, just pointing to different things, naming what they were and making elementary sentences about them. One day we were going over the color words. We'd been practicing them, so I said, "Today I'm going to give you different items, and you're going to tell me what color they are." I said, "Grass," and they replied "Green." Then I said, "The sun," and they said, "Red." And I said, "No, the sun is yellow." They all looked at me like, "No, the sun isn't yellow." Then I thought, "Oh, the flag, the flag. Their flag," And I said, "Oh, okay. The sun—you can consider the sun red and some people consider it yellow, just depending on the way they're looking at the sun. So, it's okay to say red too." I realized the culture you come from definitely determines how you use the color words.

Another time I was teaching my students the difference between "much" and "many." I taught them that you say, "We don't have much information about this." You can't count "information," so you say "much information." But we do have "many facts," and you can count "facts," so you say "many." I then gave them a series of words and said, "Tell

me whether you use ‘much’ or ‘many’ with them.” When we came to “rubber,” a student said, “Many, many rubbers.” And I said, “No, you can’t count ‘rubber.’” I said, “You could say, ‘Brazil is a country that produces much rubber.’” And she said, “But Mrs. Mathia,” and she took her eraser and she said, “you can say rubbers. Everybody in this class has a rubber. There are five rubbers in this class.” My answer, “Oh, yes, if you’re using British English, that’s okay, you can say rubber and rubbers. But if you’re in America and you want to buy a rubber, alway ask for an eraser, don’t ask for a rubber.” I didn’t give any more information because I thought that was enough. They can eventually, on their own, learn the other meaning.

Something not too well thought out on the school’s part was one year having me teach sixth grade through twelfth grade in the same class. They gave me all the students that were available at that period that needed to have ESL. That presented problems because sixth through twelfth grade is too large of an age span to be in one class. I had a twelfth-grade boy that was always trying to, I think, impress the younger kids and challenge me. He would come up with things that would be inappropriate. For example, one time he said, “I need to know the definition of a word, Mrs. Mathia. Could you tell us what ‘fag’ means?” I thought, “What do I do?” Then I said, “Oh, it’s a slang word for cigarette. It has other meanings too, but that’s the only one that you need to know.”

One time I decided I was going to teach them about something we do in America, April Fools’ Day. I always had written, in the upper left-hand corner of the board, when their next vocabulary test would be, and different important things they needed to know. I decided on April 1 they were going to have a vocabulary test, but it was really scheduled for a later date. I changed the date on the board so it said, “April 1 = vocabulary test.” The students came into class and I said, “Get seated quickly because we want to start the vocab test so we can then get some other things done.” They insisted, “There’s no vocab test.” I said, “Yes, there is, look at the board. It says that there is a vocabulary test today. It’s been scheduled.” “No, there isn’t,” they insisted once again. I said, “Yes, there is.” I handed out the papers and said, “Wait until everybody has theirs and then you can turn them over.” They were very upset, but they did as I told them. Once everyone had their quiz, I said, “Okay, you can turn them over now.” On the other side it said, “April Fool.” I then explained to them what it meant. I thought that was a good way to try to teach them something from U.S. culture.

One year the administration came to me and asked me if I would be willing to teach a consumer math class. There were some students that were not able to pass the geometry or trigonometry classes, and they needed to have math credits for graduation. I said, “Sure, I can do that.” At that time, they knew I was only two courses away from getting my AA in accounting. I was taking those two classes by correspondence. They then asked me if I could also teach an accounting class at the same time as the consumer math class. They had a programmed textbook that the students would use. They would sit in the back of the consumer math class and study it while I taught the students in the front of the class consumer math. If the accounting students had questions, I was available to answer them, and I would periodically give them unit tests.

In the consumer math class, I taught such things as how a mortgage works, how to write a check, how to balance a checkbook, how credit cards work, and what health and life insurance were. Some of the students that were taking accounting in the back of the room came up to me and said, "Can we take this class? It looks really useful." I told them I would see what the school administration thought. The students told me they were willing to study their accounting at home, so they could also have consumer math class. The school administration nixed it. They thought consumer math should only be for students who were having difficulty with higher math classes. The accounting students were disappointed, but some of them still listened to what was going on in consumer math and studied their accounting outside of class. At the end of the semester, I presented this whole case to the school board and said, "I think that this should be a class that's open to all students because the brighter students saw the efficacy of it, and they wanted to take it. I think you should offer it as an elective and also as a math class for students that need a math credit. They turned the idea down.

Q: It sounds like what we would call a personal finance class now, right? You know.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: And they're very, very useful. My son still complained that they didn't get one.

MATHIA: Right. I complained that I didn't get one when I went to high school. I was glad I was teaching it. The administration didn't want to change the system. The accounting worked fine. I would just tell the students what day they would have a test, and they would take it in the back of the room. I would collect them, grade them, and go over them the next day in class while I gave the consumer math students a written assignment or free study hall which they appreciated.

I'm kind of slow to figure out when kids are cheating, maybe because I didn't do it as a student. But I finally realized by the last test of the semester that every time I gave an accounting test this one student didn't show up. He was always sick on that day. He'd come the next day and I'd have him, while I was going over the test with the other students, sit outside and take the test. He always got all of the multiple choice and true or false correct on them. But his journal entries were just horrendously not done correctly, and I thought, How can he get all these questions that have concepts about journal entries correct, but then he can't do the journal entries? Then I realized, "Oh gosh, somebody's been feeding him the answers."

It took me until the last test of the semester to figure that out. I gave the last test of the semester and true enough, he didn't show up for the test. The next day he came. In the meantime, that night I changed all the true and false questions—the order of them—so that if he memorized the answers his friend gave him, he would get them wrong. I did the same thing with the multiple-choice questions. He ended up getting forty-some percent. And he was very upset with me. He said, "That's not fair." I said, "It's the same test. It's

the exact same test that everybody else had. It's just that the order was different." He said, "But that's not fair, you can't do that." He just was very, very upset. and I offered, "Should we go to the administration? To the principal and talk to him about it?" He said, "Yes, we'll do that."

Q: So, he had no shame or trepidation about the fact that he had been cheating?

MATHIA: No, he felt that I cheated him. That I wronged him. He felt that when we went to this meeting, he was going to be able to present his case and I was wrong and he was going to be, you know, exonerated. We went to the meeting where I told the principal beforehand what had happened. The young man right away presented his case, "She tricked me, it's not fair. She tricked me." The principal was really good. He told him, "She didn't really trick you because she used the same test. It's just that it was in a different order. There's nothing wrong with doing that. She has every right to do that." I think he was very surprised. He thought that he was going to come out winning in that situation, and he didn't.

Q: Was he Pakistani?

MATHIA: Yes, he was.

Q: So, sort of entitled—entitlement.

MATHIA: Yes. I was at a cocktail party one time and was talking to a person that worked for the United States Information Service [USIS]. I told him the story about this boy and how self-righteous he felt. He told me the same thing happened with adults. They gave them national ESL tests that were based on readings they had done in their courses. One time a test was given in which a good number of the students answered a literature question saying a man was unable to do a certain thing because "he had married the window." The correct answer was "widow." They realized you could buy cheat sheets for the test at the market, and this cheat sheet had a typo of "window" for "widow." It happens with adults too.

Another time that I saw a difference in their culture was in relation to lying. It was not seen as such a bad thing as it is in our culture. I do think it's becoming less looked down upon here in the States too because I can remember teaching at a public school in Goshen, Indiana. I was in my classroom after school one day, and I heard these two students walking down the hall. One said to the other, "It's not cheating if you don't get caught." And I thought, "Oh, it's happening here too."

Anyway, I was at the Friday market with my husband, and we were looking at carpets. I usually didn't do any carpet shopping. My husband was the real carpet shopper but I was with him that day. We stopped by and saw this one carpet that I thought was nice and I asked, "What's the size of this carpet?" The salesman said, "It's six by eight." I thought it didn't look that large. I always carry a tape measure in my purse, so I got it out and I

measured it and said, “It’s not six by eight. It’s smaller than what you said. Why would you tell me it’s six by eight when it’s much smaller?” With the straightest face and no sign of embarrassment, he said, “Oh, but *memsahib* [ma’am], I gave you the flattering figures.” And I thought, “Well, that’s a nice euphemism.” But it was just their culture.

The first time I taught typing, it was my very first class in the very first year teaching in Pakistan, and I had students from all different countries. I had one boy named Jibber, and another one named Zibril. They were from different countries, and I thought, I’ve got to be really careful because I don’t want to accidentally switch the first letters of their names and say, “Jibril” and “Zibber” because those names don’t mean anything to me. I have to be really careful with their names. Especially since as an ESL teacher I always felt it was very important to pronounce their names correctly. So, I thought, I’ve got to make sure I do this right. So, that part was a little bit of a challenge too.

When I “taught” accounting, the kids were in the back of the room. They were supposed to be quietly studying. I had a Canadian girl in the class. Her father was—I think he was from an NGO, but they had just come that year. She had graduated from high school in Canada the previous year. She was going to go on to university in Canada, but then her father got this assignment to Pakistan. Her parents felt that she was too young to be left in Canada going to school while they were in Pakistan. They decided to have her come with them and repeat her senior year. She already had a high school diploma, but they made her go to school at ISI. Consequently, she didn’t have that much incentive since she already had her diploma. She didn’t need to really study or pass her courses. She would come to class and talk to everybody in the back of the room who were supposed to be quietly studying their accounting. I would say, “It’s not time to do that. Leave them alone, they need to get their studying done and you’re disturbing the class up front taking consumer math, too.” She’d apologize and get on task, but she disrupted quite frequently. Sometimes she would sit there filing her nails. She just was not the student she should have been. At the end of the semester, I think she made it all worthwhile with a comment she wrote. On their last test of the semester, I told them, “You can make comments about the class if you’d like.” On her exam she told me she was sorry for how terrible she sometimes acted in class. She then added, “but I think that senioritis is like hepatitis and it’s worse the second time around.”

Q: Aw.

MATHIA: I thought it was worth all the trouble she gave me just to read that comment. I burst out laughing and showed it to some of my fellow teachers.

To be able to stay abreast of what was happening in ESL and in reading, I joined the International Reading Association and tried to go to conferences if there were any in the area. I once went to one in India.

One year I helped a small group of students who were taking history in a regular class. The history teacher asked me if he could send them to me for extra help, and I consented

since I had a free period at the time he wanted them to come. We worked on the exercises at the end of a chapter, and we found that some of the questions we just could not answer. The question and/or its answer was written, so that we could not understand. I knew that they had a different textbook than the rest the class had. It was supposed to be an easier textbook with less complex sentences and easier vocabulary. I realized the textbook was written with such easy vocabulary and such non-complex constructions that it ended up being more difficult for them to understand.

I had just read an article in an issue of the *Journal of Reading*, a publication of the International Reading Association. It dealt with how to evaluate the reading difficulty of textbooks. Most texts were evaluated by figuring the average number of syllables per word or looking at the number of complex sentences with the belief that texts that used smaller words and/or less complex sentences would be easier to read. The article disagreed with these methods and presented another method which they called Sentence Verification Technique [SVT]. This method had the student read a short selection from a textbook. Then they would read sixteen sentences and decide whether each sentence was old, an actual sentence or a paraphrase from the original reading, or new, a distractor sentence or a sentence from the original reading but changed so that its meaning was incorrect. I obtained a copy of the regular history text and copies of some textbooks used in the high school's basic and regular English classes. From those textbooks and the easier history textbook I already had, I developed SVT tests for each textbook. This took quite a bit of my time! I had my special history students take the "tests." If they answered around 75 percent of the sentences correctly, it meant that the text was not too difficult for them to understand. The results showed that the easier history text was really more difficult for the students to comprehend than the regular history textbook. I presented my findings at a school board meeting where they decided that the basic history text should be eliminated and all students should use the regular history textbook.

Q: Well, that's good.

MATHIA: Since we found out it really didn't help them.

Q: That's good.

MATHIA: Pakistan was the first post in which our daughter who had dyslexia would be in a situation with no special ed help. I made sure to let her teachers know that she was dyslexic. One year she was taking Spanish. She had taken a test that asked, *"¿Cuántos años tienes?*" How old are you? But in Spanish it literally means how many years do you have? Michelle's answer was, "*No tengo asnos porque vivo en la ciudad.*" I don't have donkeys because I live in the city. Her Spanish teacher came to me after school, and she said, "I've got to show you something. It's a good thing I know your daughter's dyslexic. At first when Michelle answered 'How old are you?' with 'I don't have donkeys because I live in the city,' I could not understand why she would give that answer. But then I realized that 'How many years do you have?' *'¿Cuántos años tienes?*' if it was

'*¿Cuántos asnos tienes?*' it's 'How many donkeys do you have?' and so she read *años*, years, as *asnos*, donkeys."

Q: Case proven.

MATHIA: Yes. She said she gave her partial credit for answering the question the way she thought it was. And I thought, "You should have given her full credit. I thought that was really good and creative."

Q: And showing how to understand the language.

MATHIA: So, it's a good thing that the teacher knew she had dyslexia.

Q: Yes. So, what kind of house did you have when you were in Pakistan?

MATHIA: When we came from the airport, they took us to a house and told us if it met our approval we could stay there. If not, we could look for another. It was a huge house. It had two stories. There were two bedrooms on the first floor and then two bedrooms on the second floor. I think it was made for a Pakistani family and then they decided to rent it out to the embassy. The reason I thought it was for a Pakistani family is that the bathrooms had spigots next to the toilet in addition to toilet paper holders. There was a spigot because in Pakistan they don't use toilet paper. They use their left hand and they clean themselves with just their left hand with water from the spigot. Since they clean themselves that way, they only eat with their right hand.

The master bedroom had an adjoining sitting area. The other upstairs bedroom our daughters shared. It also had an additional sitting area. And there was a big living area just as you went up the steps that led to both bedrooms with their individual sitting areas. In Islam since a man can have up to four wives, we thought the house was made with that in mind. The upstairs could accommodate two wives. The two bedrooms downstairs had a sitting area off of each of them, and each also had their own full bathroom just like upstairs.

Q: So, that would be common if—you know, for you to live in a house like that in Pakistan because that was the tradition. And maybe the house was built some time ago. But did you know a lot of Pakistani families, at that time in the 1980s, where people had multiple wives in the same household?

MATHIA: No, the only one we knew was our first servant who had had two wives. He had an older wife. I don't think she ever bore him any children, so he took a second, younger wife, and she bore him a little boy. In Pakistan most of the American ex-patriots who had servants had them stay in live-in quarters. They would get off one weekend a month when they would go home to their village to be with their family. That's what Rahim, our first servant, was doing. Then one Saturday morning we heard all this noise in the yard, and we didn't know what it was. We discovered that Rahim had brought his two

wives and his son, who was just a toddler at the time, to live with him in his quarters, a very unusual situation. Early Friday morning, they were all out in our yard making noise. We didn't say anything at first, but then he let his son come into the house. The wives did not. They were out in our yard, but they never came into the house. Their custom with children that were not yet toilet trained was to let them go naked from the waist down. That's the way his son was the first time we saw him in our house. We found it disruptive to our lifestyle to find his wives in our yard at any time of the day, and his son walking around our house naked from the waist down. We told Rahim he had to choose. Either he found another job where the employers let him have his wives and son with him or he live by himself in his quarters.

He chose to leave us, so we had to get another servant. We had some friends, a Dutch man and his girlfriend, Fazi, who was a Pakistani woman who taught horseback riding. We took horseback riding lessons from her. Through her we met Case, her future husband, the Dutch man. Since he was going to marry Fazi, and he knew that we needed a servant, he told us we could have Stephen. We took him over once Case married Fazi. He was a Christian, which was very unusual for Pakistan. Stephen thought he was special because he was Christian. He assumed we would prefer him because of this. We let Stephen know that we considered all our servants [houseboy, gardener, *chowkidar* (guard)] equal, that his being Christian did not afford him any special privileges.

Stephen did not live in. He would go home to his family every evening. When he showed up each morning, he brought his crucifix with him and made a big show of leaning against a wall in the kitchen. He would tell our *chowkidar* and the gardener that we preferred him since he was a Christian, and they were Muslims.

He was working out okay, except that he was not very good at following instructions. His way was the right way. I taught him how to make meatloaf one evening after we got home from school. I had all the ingredients out, and I had him make it and bake it. It turned out fine. The next time we were going to have meatloaf I told him, but I asked him to wait for me to cook it one more time with him. On his own he decided not to wait. He had it already made. When we ate it for supper, it did not taste right. We had two dogs at the time, and we gave it to our dogs because it just didn't taste right.

The third time we were going to have meatloaf, I once again asked him to wait till I got home to help him make it. But once again, he proceeded without me and once again we had to feed it to the dogs. The fourth time, I asked him to have all the ingredients ready for us to make together when I got home. I said if he did not wait, there would be consequences. That time he had all the ingredients out for making the meatloaf. We realized that he was putting graham crackers instead of soda crackers in the meatloaf. That's what made it taste like dog food. I told him he was using the wrong kind of crackers. He answered, "Well, *memsahib* [ma'am] you only said crackers."

Q: He was cheeky, huh?

MATHIA: Yes, he was, and even more than cheeky. As I said before he did not live in like most servants. He lived in the city and he would ride his bike to work and back home in the evening. After supper he cleaned up the kitchen and then rode home after the evening meal. I was teaching Stephen my recipes to make. They always contained enough ingredients to supply two family meals. I liked for us to have a newly cooked meal on Monday with leftovers on Wednesday and a newly cooked meal on Tuesday with its leftovers on Thursday. But the Monday and Tuesday meals were no longer large enough to have leftovers on Wednesday and Thursday. At first, I thought since the girls were getting older, they were eating more. So, I increased the amounts of ingredients, and we still did not have enough leftovers for second meals. Then one evening we stayed in the dining room for longer than normal talking to our daughters, and we saw Stephen through the dining room riding his bicycle home. On the back of his bicycle was strapped the soup pot from the soup that we had had that day. Then I realized why we didn't have enough leftovers. He was taking them to his family. We finally let him go and were once again without a servant.

Q: It gets a little complicated.

MATHIA: Yes, we finally got a third servant who worked out very, very well. A husband and wife who were teachers at ISI were going to be leaving post. They had a servant and I asked if we could take him over once they left. They consented, and the saying, "Third time's a charm" rang true in this case. His name was Abdul, and he was just a divine man. He was able to cook my recipes and other American recipes he learned from working with other Americans. He even offered to make us Pakistani food but much less spicier than normal since he knew we couldn't eat it. After that, we usually ate a Pakistani meal once a week. The first time he cooked a Pakistani meal for us, I told him not to make it so spicy, and I gave him my tin of curry from the States. He smiled politely and said, "Oh, no *memsahib* [ma'am] I won't use your curry. I want to use my curry." He did and the food was just right for us.

He made some very, very good meals for us. And he was really good with the girls. Sometimes we'd have to go to a cocktail party at night. Instead of going to his room, he would stay and watch the girls. We'd come back many times, and he and our youngest daughter were playing cards. She taught him how to play some card games, and they would be playing cards together. He was just a very nice man. When he first started working for us, he had nine children. He told us that his wife was having medical problems. We had a USAID friend who had married a Pakistani doctor. We had Abdul bring his wife back from the village, and I took her to the doctor. The doctor told Abdul's wife that she was going through menopause, and she prescribed some vitamins for her to take.

Later on, I asked Abdul how his wife was doing and he said, "Oh, she's fine, and we just had our tenth child." The doctor was mistaken. Abdul's wife wasn't missing her periods because she was going through menopause. She was pregnant with their tenth child. When it was soon time for us to leave post, we decided to take a trip to Abdul's village.

Oftentimes, he had asked us to make a trip to his village. We thought it would be a good thing for the girls [and Bob and me] to experience, so we got a four-wheel drive from the embassy and drove up to his village. We even had to ford a stream to get there, and the thought went through my mind, "He does this once a month on a bus? This trip is really something." It made me appreciate him even more.

When we got to the village, he was so happy to see us. He lived in a compound along with some of his sons and daughters who were already married and had children of their own. We went around meeting all of them, being introduced to them. He took us into his home and proudly showed us his living quarters. In one corner he had a TV, but it had a cloth over it to protect it. It was a TV that we had given him when we came back from one of our home leaves. He was very proud of it and said, "I take very good care of it." The girls got to meet some of his daughters and granddaughters. Some were wearing clothes that our girls had outgrown and given to Abdul for them. They also saw some of the toys they had given Abdul. It was a good experience for the girls to see how humbly Abdul lived and how they had helped him and his family.

Q: Now Islamabad, it was a pretty big city, right?

MATHIA: Yes, it was. In fact, that mission was the largest mission in the world at the time. Only Egypt was a larger mission. The main reason the U.S. had such a big presence in Pakistan at the time was due to the war in Afghanistan next door. We wanted the Pakistanis to help us out with that. USAID was not responsible for any military assistance [forbidden by U.S. law] but it was giving Pakistan a lot of economic aid. The U.S. government was supplying the Mujahideen with weapons and Pakistan was a good place to store them before they were needed.

Q: Was AID helping with the refugees?

MATHIA: The USAID Pakistan mission did not directly help the Afghan refugees in Pakistan. We did have a man in the mission, Larry Crandall, who was stationed in Pakistan due to the war but he was giving aid to Afghanistan. Probably some of that aid went to refugees.

Q: Was AID—

MATHIA: AID in Pakistan was building schools and giving other types of aid. One of Bob's projects was to get some farmers to stop growing poppies—to replace the crop with tomatoes or potatoes. The project was successful. Once when visiting a potato farm, Bob took a picture of one of the proud potato farmers. That picture was published in an Urdu newsletter.

USAID projects were done in hopes that Pakistan would be willing to take in the Afghan refugees and stockpile U.S. weapons for the mujahideen.

Q: No, but with the refugees. Were they able to help with the refugees?

MATHIA: Not directly.

Q: I was reading one of your stories, and it talks about wild boars, geckos, wasps, and snakes. But you were in the middle of the city?

MATHIA: Yes. Because Muslims don't eat pork, the boars ran wild. Once a friend had an encounter with a boar and her car. It ruined her car. Bob went wild boar hunting once with some Pakistanis and other Americans. Sometimes when you went to the market to get your meat, the butcher would say, "Do you want bacon? I have bacon if you want bacon." They knew that the Americans ate pork.

Once I was giving a dinner party and I asked the butcher for some beef, so I could serve roast beef. I thought he gave me beef, but it was really buffalo. I was very upset that my dinner party was ruined.

Q: Water buffalo, right?

MATHIA: Yes. And it was awful.

Q: Was it different? Was it gamey?

MATHIA: Yes, it just did not have the right flavor at all. I went back the next day with it and said, "I served this to my guests and you told me that it was beef, and it was not beef."

Q: Uh-oh.

MATHIA: That reminds me. Some of the people in the mission bought raw milk from a man that would deliver it to them by motorcycle. They would boil it before drinking it since it was unpasteurized. They preferred that to having powdered milk from the commissary or getting milk in town. But one time a friend told us he was at the market early one morning and saw the man who delivered the raw milk. He saw him walk into the market, buy some milk in cartons, and then go outside and empty the cartons of milk into the container he had on his motorcycle. So, his customers were not really buying raw milk.

Q: Another cultural thing, yes.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: Some of these countries—maybe not so much Pakistan, I think about it with Iran sometimes—with Persians—sometimes they talk about how everything's a negotiation

and everything's a haggle. And when you reach an agreement, that's just the beginning of the negotiation. So—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: But you also wrote that your husband liked to shop for rugs.

MATHIA: Yes, he did.

Q: Did he like that whole bargaining—

MATHIA: He liked that very much, yes. He liked spending a whole day talking about, looking at, and haggling for rugs. He would have tea with the merchant, chat about this and that, talk about prices, and then finally make a purchase. And sometimes not make a purchase. He thought that was fun to do. It did not interest me at all, so he would go "rugging" with another friend in the embassy, a woman. Once his friend—the woman—and another woman were looking at rugs in a merchant's house. The man said he had an errand to do, but they could stay if they wanted to keep looking at his rugs. So, the two women stayed. They then decided they were ready to leave before the merchant returned, but when he left the house, he had locked them in. It was the custom for men to lock the females in the house when they left it. These two women had to wait until he came back to let them out.

Q: And that was just the custom.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: Nothing nefarious, I guess. Something you wrote got me thinking. You said there were no safe restaurants to eat in.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: So, you meant safe in terms of the quality of the food, or safe in terms of security?

MATHIA: The sanitation. Once, I was sitting in the car waiting for Bob. It was near a Pakistani restaurant. I saw a man come out of the restaurant to wash some dishes. He went to this area that was just a tub with water in it. He went there and rinsed the dishes off and then took them back into the restaurant to be used again. I am sure the bucket of water was filthy. The only place we ate besides our house was other expatriate's houses and the American compound. There it was okay to eat.

There was not that much entertainment-wise to do in town. Pakistan was a dry country. If you wanted alcohol, you bought it from the commissary and consumed it in your home. Because of this we ended up having dinner parties and after the dinner party we played games like Trivial Pursuit. I remember one time we had some friends over and we were

eating pizza that Abdul had made. He made really good pizza. He had the dough on the cookie sheet with the sauce and cheese already added. Then each person put extra ingredients like olives, mushrooms, or pepperoni on their portion then Abdul put the trays in the oven to bake. After we ate our pizza, we played Trivial Pursuit. Virtually the only time I drank beer back then was when I had pizza. So, I had had a beer that evening. Afterwards, when we were playing Trivial Pursuit, the first question I got was, "Which one of the Wright brothers was the first to fly?" And I said, "Well, it's either Frank or Lloyd." Because I was thinking of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect instead of Orville and Wilbur Wright, the aviators.

Q: It was Wilbur, right?

MATHIA: No, it was Orville. I thought one of the men at the house that night was going to fall off his chair laughing when I gave that answer. I had the wrong Wright. Anyway, he got a good laugh because of it.

We had some really good get-togethers. For Thanksgiving we had a lot of people over potluck. At our house one time we provided the turkey, and everyone else brought something for a complete dinner. After we ate, Stan Stanfield, an elderly bachelor working at the mission, suggested we hold a badminton tournament. We had a badminton court set up in our side yard. He picked different adults and kids and got them all together as teams, so that it would be an adult and a child playing against another adult and a child. Everyone played in that tournament. I don't remember anyone sitting out. It was just so much fun. Everybody had a good time. I don't even remember who won, but it turned out to be a very nice spur of the moment thing. It was nice making our own fun. Sometimes I think that is why we consider Pakistan our most rewarding post.

Q: Did AID folks stick to themselves or did you have a lot of friends with the embassy and State Department and other agencies?

MATHIA: We had friends from the State Department also and then from the school too since I taught there. I taught with Laura Byerlee, an American, who was a high school science teacher at ISI. We became good friends. Her husband, Derek [an Australian] worked for the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center [CIMMYT]. It's based in Mexico. They work with maize and promote good agriculture throughout the world. They had a daughter and a son about the same ages as our daughters. They liked to travel. One time we traveled in two separate cars to the Swat Valley [where Malala Yousafzai is from]. I think Derek had some meetings up in Swat, and we went with them and stayed a couple days. They stayed a little bit longer, so we had to drive back to Islamabad without them. It was a little bit scary driving back home because we didn't speak Urdu. In that area, people didn't speak any English like they did in Islamabad. The signs were also all in Urdu in Arabic script, no English like in Islamabad, so we had to follow the paper directions we had. No GPS [Global Positioning System] back then, so we had to follow our written directions to get home. If we had gotten lost, we didn't even

have a way of explaining who we were or where we wanted to go. It was a little scary driving back alone, but we did okay.

Q: In April 1988 there were bomb attacks on the school that you worked at. Is that right?

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: Did you find out who had done it?

MATHIA: No, we don't really know. When we were in Pakistan, we were able to save a lot of money because we got 5 percent Sunday pay. Since it was an Islamic country, Friday was their holy day. So, we got off on Friday and Saturday, and Sunday through Thursday was our work week. Because of that supposed inconvenience, they gave Bob a 5 percent premium on his pay. Also, because Pakistan was considered a hazardous duty post he got an additional 15 percent premium. At first, I thought, "I'm happy to have that, but I don't really see why we need it." We did have a *chowkidar* that was there for twelve hours a day guarding the house. He would sit in a chair in front of the house. What he did best was open the driveway gate. When we got home from work, we honked our horn, in case he was asleep. That way he knew it was time to come and open the gate for us. They were our automatic gate opener.

While we were at post, the guard service changed from twelve to twenty-four-hours because of incidents that had happened while we were there. The first reason was that on April 14, 1986 the United States bombed Libya since Libya had been sponsoring terrorism attacks on both American citizens and troops. Those of us living in Pakistan were a little worried about Libyan retaliation. In Pakistan our license plate revealed what country we were from. For example, the United States was 64 and Libya was 52. We even had a list in our glove compartment that showed which numbers represented which country. When the American teachers at ISI were told of the U.S. attacking Libya, we were a little worried about driving home in cars that identified us as being from the United States. We cut out pieces of cardboard the size of our license plates, wrote "Applied For" on the cardboard and tied them around our license plates. We found out a couple days later that the Libyans in the country were a little worried about the Americans, and they had been covering up their plates to hide the 52s that designated them as Libyans.

On August 17, 1988, another incident happened. U.S. Ambassador Raphel and President Zia-ul-Haq along with twenty-nine other people were flying back to Islamabad after a visit to a village in Pakistan. The plane they were in blew up. It was never determined what caused the explosion. There were investigations by both Pakistan and the United States. One of the theories posited by Pakistan was that the people in the village had given a basket of mangoes to the president as a gift and that there was a bomb in it that was set to go off.

We had a memorial service for Ambassador Raphel on the U.S. embassy grounds. I went to the service. The next day at school some of my students said, "Mrs. Mathia I saw you on TV." Local reporters/photographers had come and filmed the ceremony.

A very well attended funeral was held for President Zia in a mosque that was close to our house. It was a huge mosque, still in the process of being finished, financed by Saudi Arabia for Pakistan. We were watching the procession of mourners on the way to the mosque on TV. It was estimated there were probably about a million people in the procession.

I told Bob I thought we should join the procession of mourners at this historic occasion. I put on a *shalwar kameez* (traditional attire), and we soon joined the procession of mourners since they were so close to our house. As we were walking along, some of the men started making comments in English such as, "Why is this woman here?" I then realized there weren't any women among the mourners. Bob and I decided to leave the procession and head back home, not wanting to start an international incident.

Q: Obviously, it was really tough to have the ambassador killed in a plane crash along with the president of the country.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: Was there any draw-down? Did the State Department take any families out?

MATHIA: I don't believe so, no.

Q: And was there any counseling and resilience training?

MATHIA: I think the fact that both an American and a Pakistani were killed helped the situation. But, yes, it was very shocking to have happened.

Right before that in April—that happened in August—on April 10, 1988, we were in school, and I was teaching an ESL class when all of a sudden, I heard some explosions. I looked out the window, and I saw these flashes of what looked like fire. I thought, "I don't know what this is but it sounds and looks pretty bad." One of my students in that class was an Afghan boy whose father was one of the Mujahideen leaders fighting in Afghanistan. The boy had lived in Lahore which was on the border with Afghanistan where there were often bombs going off. The Mujahideen leader thought it was not safe for his son to be in Lahore. He was probably twelve or thirteen. They thought it wasn't safe for him because there had been instances where the children of Mujahideen leaders had been kidnapped.

To remedy this situation, they put him in a vegetable cart. They drugged him so he'd be sleepy and quiet and put him in a vegetable cart. He was taken from Lahore to Islamabad, hidden in the vegetable cart. When he came to Islamabad, he was enrolled in ISI, and he

became one of my students. There was a German girl also in this class. When I said, “I think they might be bombs,” the Afghan boy agreed, “Yes, I think they are, too.” The German girl started to cry, and he said, “Don’t worry, it’s okay. You hear bombs all the time, but it’s okay.” And he tried to calm her down. We had done evacuation drills because back in ’71, I think, the school had been attacked by Pakistanis. Because of that we had practiced drills where we all proceeded to our safe haven which was the school auditorium where we had assigned areas.

Having done these drills, we knew how to proceed when over the loudspeaker we were told to go to our safe haven. My class and I proceeded to the auditorium. As we were going, you could still hear bombs. I thought, This sounds like a video game, but it’s real. It’s really happening. If one of them hits me, I hope it kills me instantly. I don’t want to just lay around in pain. I just want to be killed instantly. That’s what went through my mind.

Once we got to the auditorium, my students dispersed to their assigned areas, the ones learned from previous drills. Once we were all assembled, the principal of the high school said, “We’re going to change over to the emergency generator, so it’s going to be a little bit dark in here for a bit. You older kids, would you please help the younger kids in case they are scared. But remember this is the safest place you can be.” As he said that, a phosphorus missile went through the back of the auditorium along the back of the stage and spewed fire and then smoke. Then we had to leave the auditorium, and lie down in a prone position outside. I found myself lying down consoling a fifth-grade girl. I could feel her rapid heartbeat. She told me she had been outside for PE [physical education] class when the missiles first started coming at the school.

We were very fortunate because nobody got hurt. There were some elementary students that were assigned to sit on the stage, but luckily a couple weeks before they had performed *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers,* and they had extended the stage. By extending the stage, the children, assigned to the area where the missile entered, were not there. They were slightly forward. The missile did go through the wardrobe room. All the costumes and other props that they had been saving for years from the different plays were destroyed. But no lives were hurt.

A missile also hit the school library. Another hit a teacher’s classroom in such a way that the door got jammed and couldn’t be opened. I had powder burns on my car. A bus parked near my car had a missile enter through a rear window and cause some damage inside.

Parents drove to the school to see how their children were and to bring them home. When we were finally released and I drove the girls home, there were three lanes of traffic on a normally two-lane road. Two lanes were leaving the area while one lane was leading toward the area.

School was cancelled for about two weeks while experts on bomb disposal [I think they were Seabees] combed the school grounds to remove any missiles that were still there.

Q: Was everybody—

MATHIA: —bomb days.

Q: Oh my goodness. And how did the kids react?

MATHIA: I think they behaved admirably. I think the fact that we'd had drills previously helped a lot. For the most part the kids were very good, even the young ones.

Q: Okay. I'm going to pause the recording. Well, it sounds like you all were taking a lot of security situations in stride. I mean those are pretty traumatic, to have the school attacked, and then not close for very long after that. Things like that.

MATHIA: Yes. The effect of the Afghans and the war going on next door to Pakistan affected the school. We had my Afghan student who was so kind to the German girl when she was frightened. Another time I was teaching a class and I had an Afghan boy that was related to some Mujahedeen. He was in class when I was teaching them two-word verbs. I told the class, "You look, but you look at a picture. You look into a room. The preposition you add to the verb changes its meaning." I then asked, "Can anyone give me another example?" The Afghan boy right away said, "Yes, you shoot, but you shoot at a Russian." That was always on his mind for him to use that as his example.

I had another Afghan boy. His father was also a Mujahideen leader and an older brother was a Mujahideen fighter. The older brother had come to school to see how his younger brother was doing. The guidance counselor sent me a note telling me that after school I should come to the guidance office to meet with this boy's brother to discuss his school work. She hadn't given me any warning. When I walked into the meeting and the brother stood up to shake my hand, I was shocked and hoped it didn't show. His right hand had been shot off. He had a prosthetic hand. Since it was the hand you usually shake, I was not sure what to do.

We had a bicycle club at the school. Mostly elementary and middle school students participated in it. I, along with a few other teachers, were sponsors of the club. We would ride around different parts of the outskirts of Islamabad. One of the elementary students that was in the bicycle club was an Afghan refugee boy whose father also was an important leader in one of the Mujahideen groups. They were always worried about him being kidnapped, so he came to school in a Jeep with a guard. This Jeep with a driver and a guard went with us on our bicycle tours. On one of our tours another little boy crashed on his bike. The bike was ruined, and he was pretty skinned up. We were able to put the boy and his bike in the Jeep. If we didn't have the Jeep with us on the tour, the boy's accident would have been a lot more difficult to handle.

Q: But you did get to travel around the country and in the region?

MATHIA: Yes, we were able to do both. We went to Tarbela Dam a number of times. At the time—I don't know if it still is—but it was the largest earthen dam in the world. We went there a number of times. We also went to Murree, which was a hill station during the time that Pakistan was part of India and India was a British colony. Our U.S. ambassador had a house up there that we could sign up for and use. We went there a number of times with friends and walked around Murree, roasted marshmallows in the fireplace, and hiked. I am currently reading Jonathan Addleton's oral interview, and he talks about Murree. His parents were missionaries, and he went to Murree Christian School. He talks about being born on a kitchen table in Murree. On reading this I thought, "I know where that is because I've been there." I was reading Jonathan Addleton's oral interview because I recognized his name. He and Bob overlapped for part of our tour in Pakistan.

We also visited Taxila.

Q: Ruins?

MATHIA: Yes, ruins. They're not nearly as important as Mohenjodaro, which was much further away. Taxila is only about a half-hour, forty-five minutes away from Islamabad. One of ISI's history teachers would take her students to Taxila for a field trip, and we went along on one.

We also went to Lahore a number of times. The first time we went it was my husband and I with another couple, but the second time Bob and I and the girls went. That second time he brought rupees with him because he wanted to go rug hunting in Lahore. The first day we were there he did a little bit of rugging, but he didn't buy anything. He was waiting until the next day. That afternoon we went to the Lahore zoo, and Bob decided that he wanted to take a ride on an elephant with the girls. I had already been on an elephant in India, but he hadn't. So, I stayed back to take pictures of the three of them riding an elephant. Besides taking a ride on the elephant, you could put a rupee in his trunk, and the elephant would hand it up to the driver.

Bob told me to keep the camera out since he planned to give the elephant a rupee when he got off. Back on the ground, he reached in his pocket for his wallet to get a rupee when he realized it had been stolen. There were quite a few other people on the elephant when Bob and the girls rode it. Bob thinks his wallet was stolen while he was on the ride.

Q: Oh.

MATHIA: We got a local AID employee that was in Lahore to interpret for us, and we reported the stolen wallet to the head zookeeper. Something Bob emphasized was that he didn't care about the money in the wallet, but he was concerned about his credit cards and IDs. A couple of weeks later the wallet showed up at the embassy. Bob said that

everything was there that he said he hoped would be there. He forgot to say he would like the photos he had in the wallet. They were not returned.

Q: Oh, that's too bad. It's not as if they needed them.

MATHIA: Of course, he no longer had any rupees to buy carpets.

Q: Oh, well. I was just looking up some—Ambassador Raphel was your ambassador for almost all your time there. Is that right?

MATHIA: Yes, he was. Because we left in '89 and he was killed in '88.

Q: But when you got there, Ambassador Deane Hinton was already gone?

MATHIA: I think he was there at the very first.

Q: Okay. He was a legend. One of the old crusty types.

MATHIA: Yes. I think he was the ambassador in El Salvador when we moved to the Dominican Republic and I became the AID mission director's secretary. I would take phone calls sometimes from him and have to tell my boss that Mr. Hinton was on the line. He was very gruff, even then. One time I had him on hold because my boss was talking to someone else. When I finally took him off hold, he was angry with me for putting him on hold for so long.

Q: So, and then after Salvador he went to Costa Rica. That was his last tour. And I met him there on my second tour. I went into the staff meeting the first day and my boss gave me a lovely introduction.

MATHIA: He was. Oh, go ahead.

Q: When we came around the room to me at the end he said, "So what else do you have to say?" And I said, "Nothing today, sir." And he said, "You will never do that again! If you come to a meeting you must have something to say." That was my very first time in a country—

MATHIA: Oh.

Q: But I don't know, I kind of got used to those kinds of—crusty but smart and—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: —you know, they did care about people. They just kind of had a gruff exterior.

MATHIA: Yes. Well, yes, he was there at first. I remember going to the pool that's on the compound and his wife, Patricia, was there with her son from a previous marriage. He met her, I think, in El Salvador, and she was Salvadoran, and he married her.

Q: He had a few wives. He wrote a memoir. He wrote a memoir and it was one of the books that ADST [Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training] edited and helped distribute. And the woman who does the editing said, "All those wives!"

MATHIA: Oh, interesting. I'll have to read that.

Q: But your girls had a good time in Pakistan?

MATHIA: Yes. In fact, one thing that was really good about the school were their sports competitions. Since they were the only American school nearby it was very difficult to compete in the normal way by visiting other schools. Instead, the surrounding American and/or international schools would get together at one school for a weekend of competing. Our daughters were on the swim team. The swimming and track competitions were held on the same weekend. They would practice for the swim team, but they also made them do track since there weren't enough students for track. One year swim and track met in Islamabad, so Bob and I could help out. I was one of the judges who made sure the swimmers made proper turns during their race.

We had other schools from Pakistan such as Murree Christian School and the school in Lahore. Also, there were schools from Sri Lanka and India. The kids from Sri Lanka were really good. They practiced their swimming in the ocean rather than in a pool. The ISI parents offered their homes as a place for the visiting students to stay. We hosted students who were competing against our own children. This didn't phase me as being unusual, but recently I had a friend post on Facebook his displeasure with the fact that his daughter was going to a state swim competition where her team was going to be transported in the same bus with a competing school's team. I wonder how he would feel if he knew we hosted children in our homes who would be competing against our own children.

One year the swim competition was held in Delhi, India. The ISI coaches and chaperones for this meet decided to take the students on a side trip to the Taj Mahal. Our daughters had already been to the Taj Mahal a number of times. When they found out about this side trip, their reaction was, "Not again. We're going to have to take off our shoes, and our feet are going to be hot on the marble. We have to go to the Taj Mahal again!" I thought, Only a Foreign Service kid would say something like that.

We did travel to India a number of times. Bob and I went once with the Asian study group, where we took the "golden triangle tour" visiting Delhi, Agra [with the Taj Mahal], and Jaipur [with the Pink Palace where we lodged].

We went to Thailand a couple times. We went for one Christmas season. While there we consented to taking the girls to an American-style fast-food place where we ran into a few expatriate families also stationed in Pakistan who were in Thailand for the holidays! On this same trip, we went to a combination amusement/water park in Bangkok. There was hardly anyone at the park since it was considered winter and too cold for the local Thais to attend. We didn't have to wait long in any line for any of the amusement rides. A few times the kids would get off a ride they had just enjoyed and get right back on without waiting in line.

We also took a trip to Thailand with the Byerlee family, the family that we had previously gone with to the Swat Valley in Pakistan. Derek, the husband, loved to try every food he could. There wasn't an outdoor food stall he could pass up without sampling something.

We took a boat trip with them on the Mae Ping River from Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai. We got to Chiang Mai by rickshaw. In Chiang Mai, we boarded an Asian style boat. It was long and narrow. The pilot sat in the back near the motor to steer the boat.

Right towards the end of our tour in Pakistan, the Khunjerab Pass was opened. Construction of the road was finally finished from Islamabad all the way up to the border with China. The Asian Study Group offered a trip along the pass up to China. We went with our daughters. Enough people went on the trip that we took two buses. The girls had to miss some days of school, so they made up all the schoolwork they would miss before the trip. [We were lucky that our daughters were always conscientious about school.] Getting there took two days and then two days to return. We knew the places where we would eat would have food too spicy for us, so we took along some vegetables and fruits for us to eat. Fortunately, at the meals the rice was served separately. We would eat the rice at the restaurant and then go back to our lodging for some of our own vegetables and fruits.

It was very cold during the trip, and the hotels were not heated. We didn't take our clothes off the whole time we were there. We slept in them and never bathed the entire four days. When we got to the Chinese border, our bus driver warned us to take it easy once we left the bus. He warned us that we would have to get acclimated to the higher altitude. A few younger children did not heed his warning and ended up getting sick. A German couple on the trip brought some wine with them to drink when they reached the border. Pakistan is a dry country, so I was surprised that they had done so. They drank their wine and soon also got sick like the children who had been running around.

Q: How high is it?

MATHIA: Over fifteen thousand feet. I think it is the highest border town in the world.

Q: Very, very high.

MATHIA: Yes. On the way back we were in the lead bus. We stopped at a restaurant to eat, but the second bus didn't show up. It had been following us but experienced an avalanche on a part of the road our bus had already passed. We had to wait for the second bus until they cleared away the avalanche and it could catch up with us. It was an exciting trip, but the first thing we all did when we got back to Islamabad was to take showers. We hadn't bathed for four days and felt very grungy. But it was a good experience.

Q: That's good.

MATHIA: I'm not a camper, so that was a lot for me.

Q: Alright. Well, are you ready to move on to the next tour?

MATHIA: I think so, yes.

Q: Okay. So, how did it come about that you got assigned to the Dominican Republic?

MATHIA: It was an unexpected assignment because it was in the middle of the school year. We found out in October or November that we were being reassigned to the DR [Dominican Republic]. We left Pakistan in December, went back to Indiana for Christmas, and then on to the DR in January.

Q: You had another near miss on the security side.

MATHIA: Yes. We were flying from Islamabad to London, then London to Detroit, and finally from Detroit to South Bend, Indiana. We were scheduled to fly from London on December 21, but when I realized I had a final exam in one of my classes that would conflict, we re-scheduled to December 22. That date change proved to be serendipitous. We got to London fine. At Heathrow airport waiting for our flight from London to Detroit, we visited the duty-free store. In order to purchase an item, I had to produce my plane ticket. When the woman waiting on me saw my ticket, she commented, "You're on the flight that crashed yesterday." On December 21 the flight we would have been on from London to Detroit never made it. It crashed in Lockerbie, Scotland.

Q: Lockerbie, Scotland. Right. And that was Pan Am 103.

MATHIA: Yes, it was. Changing our flight by one day saved us from being on the plane that crashed. My brother-in-law in Maryland knew we were flying in soon. He was listening to the radio in the morning and heard about the Pan Am flight. He ran downstairs to ask my twin sister if she knew the details of our flights. We were lucky. We were very lucky.

Q: That must have given people nightmares.

MATHIA: Yes, since they didn't know exactly which flight we were on.

Q: So, you had like a home leave—

MATHIA: Yes, a home leave.

Q: —and then you arrived in the DR [Dominican Republic] in early 1989.

MATHIA: Right. The girls had to enter a new school, the Carol Morgan School [CMS], in the middle of the year. For Michelle it was the second half of tenth grade, and for Jennifer, the second half of eighth grade.

It was difficult for them because the school was very different from what they were used to. They were used to going to school with classmates from many different countries [more than fifty]. At CMS, most students were either Dominican or American. The school also was not nearly as academically challenging as ISI had been.

It was difficult for our daughters to make friends with the Dominican girls. They did make friends with a neighbor, a Dominican girl, but the ones at the school were mainly from wealthy Dominican families, and Michelle and Jennifer did not fit in.

Here's an example of one difficulty Jenny had. She had fairly light brown hair back then from all our years of year-round tropical sun. One of the Dominican girls came up to Jenn and asked her what color dye she used on her hair. When Jenn told her that she didn't dye her hair, the girl would not believe her. She insinuated that Jenn was lying because she did not want to give away her secret for her beautiful hair.

Q: So, they were in high school?

MATHIA: Jen was in eighth grade, and Michelle was in tenth grade. Michelle graduated from the Carol Morgan School. Jen was in tenth grade when we left the Dominican Republic. We were only in the DR for two years.

Q: So, those were hard years in the DR. I don't know too much about it, but I remember a friend of mine went off on his first tour as a consular officer, and it may have been '88 that he went. And there were outages of all types. Right? There were electricity outages and gasoline and water outages.

MATHIA: Yes. The gas shortages got so bad that the embassy imported gas and rationed it out to both the local AID employees and to us. Locals without this advantage would hire people to wait in line at gas stations to have their tanks filled.

The electrical outages were so frequent that the embassy issued us generators and kept them filled with gas. The neighbors all around us were Dominicans. They did not have generators. When there was an outage and we used our generator for electricity, it was very noisy, smelly, and caused a black film to build up on items in our house. We at least

had electricity for these inconveniences, but our Dominican neighbors also experienced the noise, smell, and dirt without the electricity. They eventually encased the generators in little houses to cut down on the noise, but they were still fairly noisy and still left a sooty mess. We tried not to run ours unless we absolutely had to since we knew it was a sore point with the neighbors.

Q: But you had a house. You weren't in an apartment.

MATHIA: Yes, we had a house. In the morning I would wake up to the alarm. The first thing I did was turn on my bedside lamp to determine whether or not we had electricity. If the bulb didn't light up, I took the flashlight I had on the nightstand and used it to guide me from the bedroom to the kitchen where the switch was to turn on the generator. In that way we had electricity to help us get ready for work.

The DR was our most difficult post comfort-wise. It was very hot and humid there. When there were outages, you didn't have electricity for the air conditioning, so we would get very uncomfortable.

Q: I made a list of some of the things that you wrote about in your story—your essay. Problems with the school, water problems, dog mishaps, expensive housing, electrical outages, gas shortages, food shortages—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: —sugar and things, termites and rats, a maid who stole from you—

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: —and a man with a gun on the beach.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: So, it sounded like the third-world finally.

MATHIA: Yes, it was very challenging. Then unexpectedly there was an opening in Panama, and it was offered to Bob. We gladly took it because we really did not want to stay in the DR. We were happy to leave.

Q: Okay, I'm sorry. There was one point where one of your daughters asked to finish up high school in the States, is that right?

MATHIA: Yes, when we moved to Panama our older daughter was ready for college. She was going to go to Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. On one of our home leaves when the girls were in high school, we took them on tours of the public universities in Indiana. We had told them we would pay for their college as long as they went to an

Indiana land grant college. Michelle knew she wanted to major in architecture, so she applied to Ball State, the only one that offered architecture.

While doing the summer tour of universities, we discovered that the state of Indiana had started a school called the Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics, and Humanities. It covered a student's junior and senior years of high school. Two students from each of the ninety-two counties in Indiana were selected to attend along with a few extras. The state paid the student's tuition and room and board. This honors high school was located on Ball State's campus.

When we moved to Panama, Michelle was ready for college and Jennifer would be a junior in high school. Jenn had been very unhappy at CMS and insisted that what helped her get through was the fact that her sister also attended CMS. She was afraid to attend high school without her sister who would be away at college. The high school she would be attending in Panama was Balboa High School, a DOD school.

I suggested we visit Balboa High School [BHS], take a tour, and talk with the principal and/or a guidance counselor to learn more about the school. I warned her in advance that if she were reluctant to attend BHS, we would not be sending her to any expensive, private high school. After the tour she was convinced that she would not fit in at BHS and it did not have a challenging enough curriculum.

I was not sure what to do. Then I remembered the Indiana Academy we had toured along with our tour of Ball State in Muncie. We contacted them and were told she was eligible to apply since she still had relatives [my mom and her husband] living in Indiana. Jennifer applied with excellent grades. I also think the fact that the Indiana Academy could say one of its students was from overseas helped. She was accepted, so both Michelle and Jennifer left that fall for Muncie, Indiana. Bob and I had become empty nesters with our daughters far away from home.

Q: They were in the same town on the same campus?

MATHIA: Yes, both were in Muncie, Indiana.

Q: Oh, how nice. They had gotten used to traveling the world together.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: But I think a couple years earlier you had talked your older daughter out of going to live with your sister. Is that right?

MATHIA: Oh, no, that was the younger one. The older one was always much more adaptable than the younger one. When we were in the Dominican Republic, the first summer that we went home, she asked my twin sister, without our knowledge, if she could stay with her and go to high school in Maryland. My sister agreed if it was okay

with Bob and me. When Jenny approached us with this plan, we told her we were a family and we stayed together. She was very upset. She told us she couldn't return to CMS, that her Spanish teacher was horrible. He made fun of students when they made mistakes. It upset her. She said sometimes he was so mean to a fellow student that she would almost cry, and then he would make fun of her for almost crying.

I offered her a compromise. Since I was a certified Spanish teacher, I could help her if she took her Spanish by correspondence. We could see if CMS would let her take her Spanish by correspondence, so she wouldn't have to have the horrible Spanish teacher. The first thing we did when we got back to the DR was to visit the school to see if she could. At first, they refused saying that students could not take courses by correspondence if they were already taught at CMS. I told them I didn't think it was right to make my daughter attend a class where she had to experience fellow classmates being made fun of by the teacher. And I reminded them that I was a certified Spanish teacher. They finally consented but warned us not to tell other parents or students because they didn't want to set a precedent. Later on, I found that there were other students taking courses by correspondence in other subjects.

Q: Wow.

MATHIA: I think CMS was not meeting the requirements of quite a few of the people.

Q: So, the school was problematic in a few ways, and you didn't actually teach there during your time there. Is that right?

MATHIA: Yes. I was offered a job at the school, but the pay was much lower than what I had been getting in Pakistan. I decided not to take it. The Peace Corps director at post had a daughter that was learning disabled. She needed extra help, and his wife asked me if I would tutor her. I went to CMS the first hour in the morning and met with her at the library for tutoring.

Then a job opening came as the AID mission director's secretary. The current secretary was leaving. Normally, someone already working as a direct hire in the State Department gets the job. But there was nothing that prevented me from applying for the position, so I applied. I think they were happy to get me since it saved the mission monetarily. My housing and transportation to and from post was already taken care of through Bob. I was hired. It was very different from teaching, but it was a nice change. I still got to do some teaching. The girls would bring home friends that would want help with the papers they were writing.

Q: So that was your first time really working inside the mission, right?

MATHIA: Yes, it was the very first and only time. It was a little scary at first. When the phone rang, I hoped the person at the other end would speak English because I was

unsure of my oral Spanish since it had been quite a while since I used it. It got easier as time went on.

The most difficult part of the job was meeting certain requirements such as how to handle classified documents. In 1989 there was no internet. I typed classified cables on typewriters that had a film ribbon that recorded every letter typed. When you typed a classified document, you typed it using a tape that was dedicated to classified documents and was supposed to be stored in a vault with a combination when it was not being used.

We had really good marine guards that would come through the building, usually at night, to make sure that you were doing what you were supposed to. They would actually take the ribbon out of my typewriter and unwind it to read it and make sure I had not left the classified ribbon in the machine.

In the DR, the AID mission was located in three different buildings with the U.S. embassy within walking distance of all three. I had to do what was called a cable run. I walked to the embassy. Inside I went to the mailroom where I had to know the combination to enter the gated area. I then went to the AID mailbox where there was another combination to get in. This was due to the fact that some of the mail might be classified. Once I got the mail, I kept any classified material to take back to the main AID office to place in a secure spot. Then by reading the cables, I determined which ones went to which of the three AID buildings and took them there.

Q: Combinations.

MATHIA: Yes, I needed to have four combinations memorized. We had a secure vault in our office. I needed to know the combination to enter it. One, once inside there was a secure file cabinet. I had to know its combination in order to store the classified cables there. Two, at the embassy, I had to know the combination to get into the mailroom. Three, once in the mailroom, I had to know the combination to get into the USAID mailbox. Four, once I was back in my office, I would store any classified cables in the vault in the file cabinet. I would note who needed to read what cable. For example, there might be a cable that had something to do with agriculture. I would then call the head of agriculture and tell him he needed to come to the main office to read a classified cable. When the officer showed up, I retrieved the cable from the file cabinet in the vault. He had to sit right there and read the cable. When he was finished, he gave it to me to return to the file cabinet in the vault.

I am ashamed to say I got a few security violations while I worked there. Our oldest daughter was getting braces. Every Friday she would come to the office after school. I would take off to take her to the orthodontist. When her visit was over, I came back to the office to finish up the workday. Sometimes when I got ready to leave the office to take her to the orthodontist, I had a classified document I was working on. I was supposed to lock it up before I left. Once or twice I simply slipped it inside my desk drawer, so it

would be handy to continue working with once I returned to the office. A marine guard caught me doing this.

Q: But you must have heard a few things that you could alert your husband about. Things coming down the pipe, visitors, or whatever. Because you were the director's assistant?

MATHIA: There really wasn't—not really.

Q: It wasn't that interesting.

MATHIA: No, I had to read enough of the cable to know what division chief [or sometimes the AID director himself] to call and come read it. I don't ever remember reading anything that I thought should be classified. I remember speaking with a woman who worked at an embassy and telling her this. She said she read the local newspapers and showed her boss items that might be of interest to the mission. Sometimes her boss would then ask her to classify some of the articles. I thought it was strange to classify something that had been in a newspaper that anyone could read. She said sometimes the mission did not want the host country to know what they thought was important, so they classified it.

Q: Alright.

MATHIA: Another difficult part of my job was due to the fact that I was the only American secretary. All the other secretaries, even the deputy chief of mission's secretary, were Dominicans. A lot of the typing the division secretaries did was contracts between the host government and the U.S. They were bilingual contracts, one column was in Spanish, and the other column was in English. They sent these contracts to the main office, and I had to read them and have any corrections made before I took them in to the mission director. I had to make sure that both the English and the Spanish were done correctly. Sometimes the Spanish had to be changed. It was difficult to have to tell a native speaker of Spanish that I found an error in her own language. They never seemed to mind if I corrected the English side, but when I corrected the Spanish, a few secretaries were not too happy. I had to be very diplomatic about it.

Q: Alrighty. Would you like to stop here?

MATHIA: We can, yes.

Q: Or keep going?

MATHIA: We have the Dominican Republic and then Panama again, right?

Q: You went to Panama. After that—you retired after that—or he did.

MATHIA: When we were in Panama the second time, I was there the first two years of his tour. [He did four years there in all.] After that I went back to the States since I got a job teaching. I knew Bob would be retiring soon back in Indiana. When a position teaching high school ESL opened up in Goshen, Indiana after I had been at post for two years, I took it. I left for Indiana, but Bob stayed in Panama for two more years.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: He retired after that. So, he was there for four years, but I was there for only two.

Q: So, we can do one more session where you talk about Panama.

MATHIA: Okay.

Q: Then whatever you want to talk about at the end. Maybe a little sum up about the joys and challenges of being a spouse of the Foreign Service at that time. Or things you've seen that have changed.

MATHIA: A lot.

Q: One more session, does that sound good?

MATHIA: That sounds great.

Q: Alright, very good, I'm going to stop the recording.

Okay. Good afternoon, it's July 14, 2021. We're continuing our conversation with Carol Mathia. Carol, we went a little quickly last time, so was there anything you wanted to add on your time in Pakistan?

MATHIA: Just some observations I made between Pakistan and India. Before we went to the post, I read *Freedom at Midnight* in order to know more about the area that we were going to live in. One of the things that impressed me was the reason for the title of the book, *Freedom at Midnight.* The book dealt with the history of India during the time of the partition. When India had been a British colony, it consisted of what is now India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The British wanted to give India its independence but knew it would be best to divide it into two countries based on religion—Hindu and Islam. This was nearly impossible to do. The solution was to form India [Hindu] with East and West Pakistan [Islam] on either side of India. Those who drew the map determined that the majority of people in the new India were mainly Hindu while those in the new East and West Pakistan were mostly Muslim. This was virtually impossible to do. Once the Hindus and Muslims knew how the old India was to be divided, chaos ensued. There were many trains full of Muslims leaving India for either East or West Pakistan. There were also many trains full of Hindus leaving East and West Pakistan for India.

The book was called *Freedom at Midnight* because the day, August 15, was chosen for independence. The two Pakistans thought that the fourteenth would be better while the new India thought that the fifteenth was better. Therefore, it was decided to grant the countries their freedom at midnight so that both Muslim and Hindus would be satisfied since each group could then say independence came on the day they preferred.

I noticed when we were in Pakistan and were talking to Pakistani friends, we would be told that their ancestors were from what is now India and they had come to Pakistan during the Partition. But when we traveled in India and talked to any Indians, they would say that they originally lived in Pakistan, but their ancestors moved to India during the Partition.

The Pakistanis and the Indians really did not get along. When we flew from Pakistan to India, there was a half hour time difference. They didn't even want to have the same time, so they had this strange half hour time difference.

Whenever we flew from Pakistan, we had to go through a pat down before entering the plane. There were no X-ray machines, so we actually had to get patted down. The girls and I would enter a tented area in the airport where a woman would pat us down. One time the girls and I were in the tent for our pat downs. It was Michelle's turn to be patted down, but they first looked in her backpack. Inside she had a box of sixty-four crayons. The woman that was examining the box accidently dropped it, and her crayons fell all over the floor. Michelle had quite a look of anger on her face. I said, "Michelle, just pick up the crayons, put them back in the box. Everything's okay."

Another time I was going to India for a conference with some other teachers. We were going through the airport in Pakistan to get on the plane. The person that was checking our items was curious about a bag of M&M's that I was taking as a gift to the people I was going to stay with. He took the bag, looked at it and then decided to open it to see what was inside. I didn't say anything and let him continue. The woman behind me was a history teacher at ISI. She was an American, but she didn't have diplomatic privileges like I did since my husband worked for the embassy. She got very upset about their handling of my M&Ms and said, "That woman has a diplomatic passport, you let her alone, you're not allowed to touch her things." I hoped she wouldn't start an international incident. Fortunately, everything turned out okay. I just had to explain to the family I stayed with why their bag of M&Ms had already been opened.

The worst was when we flew from India back to Pakistan. Inside the Indian airport we had our pat downs. Then when we boarded the Pakistani plane, the men would have to ascend the left-hand stairway while the women ascended the right-hand side stairway. As we entered, the men had a male attendant pat them down and the women had a female attendant pat them down. The Pakistanis did not trust the Indians to have done the pat

down correctly, so they performed their own. This was just another example of how the Pakistanis and Indians did not get along.

Q: So, you must have learned a lot about Muslim culture during that time.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: And did you feel—coming back to the States later—that there were tremendous misunderstandings of Islam in the United States?

MATHIA: Yes, especially after 9/11, I spent a lot of time explaining to people that Islam is not a violent religion, that the perpetrators of 9/11 were extremists. I tried to liken it to the Klu Klux Klan. The KKK considered themselves a Christian group, but most Christians will readily say the KKK does not represent traditional Christianity.

Q: And generally, were people that you knew in Pakistan more conservative—more religious? Did they pray several times a day? Did they always observe Ramadan or fast?

MATHIA: Most of them did, yes. I think most of them in Islamabad were faithful Muslims, yes.

Q: And did it interfere with women's rights a lot?

MATHIA: When we were there Benazir Bhutto became president. Islamabad itself was more progressive than the small towns. You could see some Pakistani women in public. But compared to the States, women were more inferior to men. It made our daughters appreciate that they were Americans.

Once I was teaching a class and one of my male Pakistani students was talking about the treatment of women. He was from another area of Pakistan and he told me, "Our women like being in the house and not ever coming out. That's fine with them."

Q: Pakistan also has a reputation—the country, not the people—but the government of a lot of corruption, especially among the elites. Did that touch you at all?

MATHIA: Not really. You mean me, personally?

Q: No, your family or your lifestyle. It was more of a governmental level or a regulatory level.

MATHIA: There was a small market close to our house. We would give our daughters some rupees to go to it and buy candy. As they got older and more developed, they went one time and the storekeeper told our eldest daughter to give him a kiss. Jennifer was with her. I believe Michelle was slightly shocked by the request. Jennifer convinced her to just get out of the store as quickly as possible. They came home in a very flustered

state. A neighbor on the other side of this market was a Christian missionary. Our daughters knew his two daughters and son and played with them. I told him what had happened to Michelle. He spoke Urdu and volunteered to go to the shopkeeper and let him know he should never repeat such a request. But, of course, we never let the girls go unaccompanied to that market again.

Q: They were a bit of a target just because of the—because of the difference in the cultures of the two countries, then Muslim men might think that they were looser or—targets.

MATHIA: Right. The missionary friend let the storekeeper know that our daughters were not loose. After we left the post there were some unfortunate incidents that happened in Islamabad. On graduation night from ISI a daughter of two American teachers at the school was with some other girls and some Pakistani boys. They were in a car after a graduation party. They were stopped by a group of Muslim men who made them get out of the car. They raped the girls and beat up the Pakistani boys because they, evidently, didn't approve of Pakistani boys dating American girls.

Q: But then they raped them? Oh, my.

MATHIA: Yes, they did.

Q: Well, I didn't— With my questions about corruption I didn't mean to be judgmental. It's everywhere.

MATHIA: Yes, unfortunately, rape occurs worldwide.

Q: Okay, so we talked about—from Pakistan you had gone to the Dominican Republic, which had not been the best of the experiences for your family. And then I think last time we had gotten up to the point where you and your husband were off to—back to Panama for the second—

MATHIA: Yes, this was going to be our second time.

Q: Was he in a higher position now in Panama?

MATHIA: He became the head of his office when he came to Panama, yes.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: Yes. The mission had us live in the very apartment that the person he was replacing had lived in. The person he replaced had a problem with drug addiction. By then our government was very understanding about addictions. There was no stigma like in the past. They were mostly interested in getting the man back to the States for help. Bob came and took his place. The apartment we lived in was on the fourteenth floor. Our

first time in Panama, we lived in a duplex with a yard. The girls were one and three our first time in Panama. They were now a college freshman and a high school junior. So, it was very different. As I stated in the last interview Michelle left for Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana and Jenny went to the Indiana Academy as a junior. The academy was on Ball State's campus, so the girls were together.

I started looking for work and found a job working for the British ambassador. I wasn't really happy because I wanted to go back to teaching. I worked for him for about four months. Then an opening came up at the International School of Panama [ISP], so I resigned and went to ISP. It was really my favorite—of all my teaching jobs—it was my favorite job because I was teaching elementary students English as a second language or Spanish.

One fourth grade boy I taught both English as a second language and Spanish because he had come in the middle of the year. He was a German boy, and I had him in a class of one for English. I also had him in the fourth-grade class with all the expatriates learning Spanish. He was having to learn both English and Spanish since he only knew German. One day in his English class of which he was my only student, he sneezed, and I said, "Gesundheit." He got so upset with me. He said, "You know German and you haven't been speaking any German to me to help me out?" I had the most difficult time convincing him that that was the only German I knew. I told him that in America we say "Gesundheit" when someone sneezes even though it is German.

Q: So, anything else unusual?

MATHIA: I was teaching ESL to a Japanese boy. Later in the semester a Korean boy joined the class. It was just the two boys in the class. Everything was fine until they knew enough English. Then they started fighting with each other about their countries, each saying their country was better than the other. I'm sure they were bringing ideas from home about Japan versus Korea. I had to stop it. I said, "We don't do that. We tolerate each other. What you learn at home, doesn't enter the classroom. You have to get along here."

The Japanese boy finally knew enough English that he left the class. He became a little stinker, I think. He was misbehaving in his regular classroom. He was so bad one day that they decided to send him home for the day. He was in the office waiting for his father to come and get him when he decided to run away. It was a planning period for me when I heard some ruckus. I went outside to see what was going on when I saw the principal of the elementary school running around very upset. I asked her, "What's wrong?" She said, "Your old student ran away. His father is coming to take him home, but he ran away. It's all your fault because you taught him English, and now he's bad." They found him before the father arrived. Later on, the principal came back and apologized. She said, "In the heat of the moment. I was very upset and very worried. I'm very sorry I said what I did to you."

Q: I always felt for—we met Japanese kids, not so much Koreans, I don't think—and the elementary school that my kids went to in Honduras, and you could see how much more work the Japanese students had because they had to start from scratch on all these languages. And they could be very, very smart, but you don't have any vocabulary to be able to speak.

MATHIA: Right. Also, the Japanese children at most posts also had to go to Saturday school in Japanese. I know it was that way in Pakistan.

Q: It's very hard, but for us it looked like—I mean, we were very much admiring the young boy that we met as a first-grader.

MATHIA: Most of the Japanese children, at least when we were in Pakistan, went to ISI, but they also went to Saturday school. The Japanese always had their Saturday school where they taught them Japanese and tried to keep them ready for when they went back to Japan. When we were in Pakistan, the Japanese finally got their own school, and all our Japanese students left ISI. Shortly before they all left ISI, the Japanese embassy had a dinner for all the teachers at ISI. It was as a thank you to all of us for helping their children until they could have a school of their own.

Q: That's kind. So, tell me, what are some of the most important things to keep in mind if you're teaching English to elementary school kids? What are the keys to success?

MATHIA: When I taught elementary ESL in Panama, I found games in English, kits with instructions in English on how to make things. I mainly let them learn English by playing. They seemed to really like that. It also helped that when they left my class they went back to a classroom where only English was spoken. I felt like I didn't need to be as formal in teaching them their English as I was when I taught older kids in the classroom. I helped them learn English in a fun way. After all, the English in their classroom was for learning math, science, and other academic subjects. I wanted them to be able to do some non-academic things in English too.

Q: And do you find that unlike older kids and adults, they didn't really worry about the grammar, they just wanted to have enough to say?

MATHIA: I think somewhat so, yes, that they're not as shy about it. Right? They don't worry as much about making mistakes.

But it always depends on the student and their learning style. When I taught Spanish in the elementary classes, I had an American friend whose husband also worked for AID. They had a daughter and a son. At home they knew Spanish. The mother told me she knew that they knew Spanish because they'd talk to the maid sometimes, but they weren't eager to try to speak Spanish in any other situations. Her two children came to me for Spanish class where I did use a textbook that was written for elementary English-speaking students learning Spanish. After her children had been in my class for a

while, we were at a party, and she came up to me and said, "You know my kids would never really speak Spanish, but now that they took your class, they'll speak it." She said she thought they were old enough that they wanted some structure which I provided, and it finally made them feel confident to speak Spanish. I think maybe her children were the type that didn't like making mistakes, and once I showed them the patterns of the language, it gave them more confidence. She told me, "They're speaking it now that they've taken class with you."

Q: Yes.

MATHIA: So, they knew it. They just needed to have a little bit of confidence.

Q: My younger son would not speak it for years and years. Even in high school he ended up taking Advanced Placement [Advanced Placement] here in Virginia, and the teachers were so shocked when he did really well—pretty well—on the AP exam. They had no idea that he had it—that he had absorbed that much.

MATHIA: Right. When we were in Honduras and our oldest daughter was born, she was hearing the maid speak Spanish and then Bob and I speak English, and she was really slow to speak.

Q: Right.

MATHIA: But once she did speak, she pronounced everything perfectly in both languages. Somebody would ask her, "What's your name?" And she'd say, "Michelle [pronounced me-shell]." But if they'd say, "¿*Cómo te llamas*? (what is your name?)" she'd say, "*me chel.*" That's how the maid pronounced her name. She just knew to do that. At the age of three she left Honduras for Panama where our maid spoke only English. Her parents were originally from Barbados. When Michelle took Spanish in high school, she had very good pronunciation. I think it's because when she was little, she had to make all those sounds that you make in Spanish and she remembered them. You know, her tongue had remembered how to trill the r's and so on. So, she always had very good pronunciation.

Q: So, for the two years that you were in Panama this time, what years were this you're talking about?

MATHIA: Ninety-three to '97 was for my husband, and for me it was '93 to '95.

Q: Right. So did you do anything else? Or you taught younger children the whole time?

MATHIA: I taught at the International School of Panama for about a year. They were in the process of building a school outside of town. They finally had it finished and were going to move out there. Originally, ISP consisted of three different houses in town made into classrooms. Now that the school building was finished, they were going to move out

of town. I didn't want to do that. I also knew this was going to be our last post, that Bob was going to retire from Panama. I knew that when we returned to the States, I wanted to continue teaching. At the time I didn't realize they had a need for ESL teachers in the States. I thought I needed to get certified in another area, so I decided to go to the Panama Canal College and take a math class and work towards getting certified in math. I was virtually the only female there except for the teacher, Mrs. Baka. Most of the students were young enlisted U.S. military. One day after class I was talking to her and mentioned that I had taught ESL there years ago when it was known as the Canal Zone College. With a surprised look, she said, "You did? My husband's the head of the ESL department, and he needs teachers. Would you want to teach?" Since I was only taking the one math class, I told her I would. I then started teaching ESL again, but this time the school was called Panama Canal College, not Canal Zone College.

The math class was very good. The woman was an excellent teacher. Her philosophy was everybody can learn, and you just have to make sure that you know that they're learning. She had her room set up so that there were blackboards on three of the walls and she would have everybody go up to the board and do problems. Then she could see who was having difficulty with their problems and help them. After we had our problems put on the board, we would go over each one individually. Many times our problems involved math that you could do in your head. A lot of my classmates would use their calculators instead to speed it up. I would just do it in my head and work on it.

One day in class she said, "I want everybody to go to the board, and I want you to figure out what two to the twenty-sixth power is. But don't use your calculators. You just have to use your head." I did a lot of the preliminary calculating in my head and wrote the rest on the board. We had been told to sit down once we had solved two to the twenty-sixth power. I was the first to sit down. Everyone else continued working for quite a bit longer. When everyone was finally seated, Mrs. Baca said, "I want you to know that Carol Mathia was sitting here for at least five minutes before anybody else sat down. It's because she could do so much in her head while you rely on calculators." I felt complimented but at the same time I felt old. I had learned my math facts before calculators. That's why I could do it so fast.

Q: We were just talking the other day—on the Fourth of July we had a few people over—and we were talking about how our brains are being rotted by—

MATHIA: Too much help.

Q: —GPS, right? Instead of learning how to get around a city without some voice telling you.

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: Or knowing how to use maps. Yes, I think she was making a good point. So, in this last tour did you get more involved with the American embassy or the mission, the AID mission?

MATHIA: No, I was working, and I was only there for two years. Then we went home for the summer and I started looking for a job. I found one in Goshen, Indiana. We had bought a home in Syracuse, Indiana on a lake the year before. It was a twenty-minute drive to Goshen High School [GHS]. When Bob went back to Panama, I stayed in Syracuse and started teaching at GHS. One summer break, I went back to Panama to be with Bob. That summer, my twin sister and her husband came to visit too.

We had quite an adventure that summer in Panama. The mission had built a bridge over the Tulum River. There were kids on either side of the river, and the school was only on one side. It was difficult for the kids to get to school some days because the river was not passable, and there was no bridge. AID built a bridge. Some AID employees, local and American, were going to surprise the AID mission director, Kevin Kelly. It had been decided to name the bridge after him. There was going to be a dedication of the bridge and at that time Kevin would see that they had named it after him.

One of our FSNs [Foreign Service national], José Sánchez, decided that he would get a group of people to go on this trip to Boca de Tulum. It was not an easy place to get to. The four of us decided we wanted to be a part of that trip. We started out from the embassy in four-wheel drives and got far enough on the first day to stay at a hotel and continue our trip the next day. They had an electrical outage when we first got there, so we had to wait till the lights came back on to take our luggage in. The next day we continued taking the four-wheel drives. It was very muddy in some places, and sometimes we had to use chains and connect to a tree with a winch to help pull us out of the mud. Finally, we got to an area where we had to change from vehicles to boats. We went in *cayucos* (canoes), along the river until we reached Boca de Tulum.

Q: And did you say that your sister was visiting?

MATHIA: Yes.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: My husband and I and my twin sister and her husband were all on the trip. We finally got to Boca de Tulum for the ceremony. On the way, we had to get out of the *cayucos* and ford part of the river because parts were too shallow and/or too rocky for the *cayucos*. When we finally got there, we were all wet, we were a mess, but we were ready for the ceremony. They started the ceremony, and José Sánchez, the FSN who had planned the trip, was speaking in Spanish. He was telling the audience, the citizens of Boca de Tulum, that the bridge was a gift from the U.S. taxpayers. He then asked Karen and Vernon to come up. He said they were examples of U.S. taxpayers from the state of Maryland, and their taxes helped make the bridge possible.

I knew what they were saying, and Karen understood a little bit. I told her and Vernon that Jose wanted them to go up front where he could thank them for their taxes that helped make the bridge possible. Shortly after, Kevin realized that the bridge was named after him. The people started transiting the bridge for the first time. Jose made Karen and Vernon lead the way.

Q: Oh, that's really nice.

MATHIA: When Karen and Vernon led the way, Vernon jokingly said, "They have us going first to check out if the bridge is trustworthy."

Q: What kind of community was it? Was it an indigenous community?

MATHIA: No, they were *campesinos* (country folk), humble farmers.

Q: One of my favorite photos—I don't know if you can see this—is of a little indigenous girl in Costa Rica, on a very rickety looking rope bridge.

MATHIA: This bridge was bigger than that. It was a little bit scary but it was well-made.

Q: It was well-built to avoid that kind of problem.

MATHIA: Right. There were some government officials that had come in for the ceremony too. They came by helicopter. They were going to stay for a meal after the ceremony. Jose must have told them what we had gone through to get to Boca de Tulum. The government officials offered us the use of their helicopter for our return part of the trip by *cayuco*. We happily accepted the offer but had to forgo the meal the villagers had provided.

Karen and Vernon have a son, Kris, two years younger than Jennifer. They had offered for him to come on the trip but he declined. Many times during their two week stay Vernon would say, "Kris is going to be sorry he didn't take this trip. He really missed a neat adventure."

On Karen and Vernon's first day in Panama City, we were driving up the road leading to our apartment. I pointed out a hotel and told them that there were casinos in it. I told them Panama City was loaded with casinos. Vernon expressed an interest in visiting a casino, so we went to the one on the way to the apartment. The four of us went, and Vernon kept winning and winning. I won quite a bit too. We both had beginners' luck.

Q: Very good. And so, why did you go back two years early?

MATHIA: Because I got a job teaching at Goshen High School in Goshen, Indiana.

Q: Okay.

MATHIA: We knew that Bob would be retiring back in Indiana, and since the teaching opportunity came along, I stayed. It was teaching English as a second language at the high school. All my students the first few years were ESL students. It was only four classes that first year but eventually they offered me the opportunity to teach ESL in some of the elementary schools in the system.

Q: And how long did you teach there?

MATHIA: How long did I teach?

Q: In Indiana.

MATHIA: My second year I told the administration that I would only stay if I could be full-time. To do so, they offered me four ESL and one Spanish class. I ended up teaching there for fifteen years. By the time I retired I was teaching all Spanish.

Q: I'm sure you were a beloved teacher.

MATHIA: Depends on the student.

Q: And your husband when he came back, did he choose another career or did he relax and go fishing?

MATHIA: He came back two years later. His first year back, he worked for H&R Block during the tax season. He did not like it. They wanted him to persuade his clients, usually poor clients, to use a quick return they were offering. For a fee, H&R Block let them walk out the door with their return money. But the fee they charged for this Bob felt was high. Bob would get a commission for every quick return he got a client to take. Bob refused to do so and did not work for them the following tax season.

Bob eventually became a contractor for AID and went to Ukraine. This was shortly after the Soviet Union had split apart. He was there helping with their constitution and privatization. He would go for three months, and then come back for three months, and then go for three months. He did that for about three years. After that he got a job with the City of South Bend, Indiana in economic development doing a lot of the same things he did when he was overseas. He did that for ten years.

Q: Was it satisfying work?

MATHIA: Yes, working for the City of South Bend. It wasn't as much fun as living in foreign countries and doing the same kind of work, but he did enjoy it, yes.

Q: Well, I skipped over. Is there anything else about your last tour in Panama that you want to mention?

MATHIA: When we first arrived in Panama the second time, it was shortly after Noriega had been ousted. The U.S. military caught Noriega and brought him to the States to stand trial for drug trafficking.

Q: Oh. So, then I know people who were there. John Dawson was the economic counselor in the embassy. He went there in December or January after Noriega left, and then Dean Hinton. He left Costa Rica where I was on my second tour and he went over December or January of that year to be the ambassador.

MATHIA Right. Noriega at first took refuge in the papal nuncio which was right down the street from the apartment that we lived in.

Q: Oh my.

MATHIA: We would sometimes walk from our apartment into town and went right by the papal nuncio. On the curb you could see the marks from the tanks that had come in by the papal nuncio when they were coming to try to get him.

Q: Remind everybody what a papal nuncio is.

MATHIA: It's an embassy for the Vatican. Noriega had taken refuge there, so our military could not touch him. He eventually gave himself up.

Q: I visited Cantadora Island with my parents during that period, and we were a little critical about certain aspects of the hotel and the resort. And then we were at dinner, and after my dad had talked to a couple of people who said, They've put on quite a stiff upper lip, Rob. This is their first real, you know, opening since Noriega started. And so, they never once made an excuse like, Oh we're sorry because we are just opening for the first time. They just took any kind of mild criticism and just ran with it and tried to make us comfortable.

Alright, well I think Carol, I'm interested in your views of your time as a family, a spouse with AID, with the U.S. missions around the world. It was exciting. Any of your perspectives on how the U.S. government, the embassy supported its mission members. How the experience of having to move around so much affected your family positively. Anything you want to talk about.

MATHIA: Yes, I think over time AID and the State Department became more and more amenable to helping out the families. The 1972 Directive was just the beginning. After that came tandem couples, the Community Liaison Office, and even help at the overseas schools for children with learning disabilities.

Q: The Community Liaison Office developed over time. They were usually spouses—eligible family members.

MATHIA: So, they did try to help. I think I was lucky because I knew Spanish. I think that helped me a lot because most of our beginning posts were in Spanish-speaking countries and that made it easier for me to adjust.

I think one of the best things about being in the Foreign Service was what it did for our children. I think it made them a lot more accepting and tolerant of differences. Our older daughter got her degree in architecture and worked in Chicago for about five years. She then decided to go to the University of London to get her master's. While in London, she met an Australian who she eventually married. She now lives in Australia with her husband and two children.

Q: Oh, far away.

MATHIA: Yes, she's very far away and because of COVID we have not been able to visit her nor have her family visit us. Fortunately, they came to Wyoming to visit us at Christmas 2019. They went back home to Australia in January of 2020, less than three months before our COVID lockdown. We FaceTime with them which is nice but not the same as being together.

I think the Foreign Service made our daughters a lot more accepting of different cultures and differences in people. In that respect, it was really good. The Foreign Service also was a cheap way for us to see the world. We were very lucky to do that.

For me the pluses well outweigh the minuses.

One minus, though, was the dangerous situations we sometimes found ourselves in at post, especially in Pakistan. We went to Disney World the summer after we experienced the missiles hitting our school. When our younger daughter got on some of the rides, the noise they made reminded her of the missiles and she was not too happy.

Jenny and I had the opportunity to take part in Story Corps when it came to Cheyenne, Wyoming. Jenny is a media specialist at a high school in Cheyenne. I think of the four of us, she was the one most affected by the missiles at ISI.

I asked Jenny if she would be a part of StoryCorps with me. When we were participating in the StoryCorps, one of the things I talked about was feeling guilty that as parents we forced our daughters to be part of the Foreign Service and be put in sometimes dangerous situations. Her reply to my concern was so touching. She said she realized that part of her dad's job caused the danger, but she and Michelle were fine. They learned a lot by living overseas and she was glad she had that experience. Taking part in Story Corps was really good for me because I had always felt guilty, and she relieved me of my guilt.

Q: Oh, that's a sweet story. Were you an outlier in terms of spouses that worked outside of the home, most of the time?

MATHIA: At the beginning in my first post in Honduras I was. Also, in our second post in Panama, not many spouses worked. But by the time we were in Pakistan, there were a lot more working spouses. Really, Honduras was the only post where I felt out of place as a Foreign Service wife.

Q: And your friends tended to be in the community, but did you feel like other people were perhaps not as happy or more frustrated with the small irritations and disadvantages of living overseas or in developing countries because they didn't have other things to fill their time? Or do you think they found—

MATHIA: I didn't really have that many friends that were in that situation, and I don't really remember wives, especially complaining. Where people did complain was in the Dominican Republic where we had so many electrical outages. That was hard. And another reason that the Dominican Republic was hard was that in all the other missions that we were in, I felt like the mission people stuck together and helped each other out. Especially in Pakistan, we really were like a family in doing things together like our special Thanksgiving Day badminton tournament.

But in the Dominican Republic it was almost like every family was on its own. You had to find your own housing there, and you had to pay for your housing yourself. If you were outside your housing allowance, you just had to pay the extra. There were cases where people would find a house and then somebody else that was looking for a house would offer the landlord even more rent because they were looking for a house too. They would just steal the house away from you. There wasn't community spirit in the DR.

Q: It was dog eat dog, huh?

MATHIA: Yes, it was very much so.

Q: You know, I've been deputy chief of mission and a consular general three times. So, I was sort of in a leadership position overseas, and the biggest challenge for me wasn't AID, because they took good care of their family, but some of the military missions were not able to buy into the housing pool services. So, if something went wrong with their elevators or power or water pipes or anything, they were outside of this embassy safety net. And they were so angry about it, even though it was usually their agency who had made these decisions not to support these services. Sometimes spouses in the Foreign Service are resentful of the interruption in their careers—in their working careers. I'm interviewing someone who was an officer, and she said her male spouse, she felt with male spouses it was harder somehow. But I think you found teaching to be portable and very rewarding.

MATHIA: Yes. The one time I was upset though was when we had to leave Panama the first time because I was really happy teaching there. I had good camaraderie with my colleagues. I didn't want to leave. It was sudden and unexpected. I wasn't happy about that. When we came back to the States, I found that was the hardest place of all for me to find a job. I can remember putting the kids to bed for their naps, and I would cry and cry because I still hadn't found a job. I really wanted to have a job.

I was fortunate that I had chosen teaching as a profession because at most posts it was not difficult to find work.

Q: And your husband and children were very lucky to have you because you viewed this whole lifestyle as a great opportunity for them, and I think that's wonderful. I think that's the end of our interview.

MATHIA: Okay. Well, thank you so much. I've enjoyed it very much

Q: Thank you, Carol.

End of interview