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

LOUIS MAZEL

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is September 7th, and this is our first session with Ambassador Louis Mazel-

MAZEL: I don't use the title 'ambassador.' Even though I was chief of mission, I used the term chief of mission as I was not Congressionally confirmed.

Q: Very good. Our first question always begins with where were you born and raised?

MAZEL: I grew up in the south Bronx in New York City, in a fairly multicultural neighborhood; lots of children of immigrants, most first or second-generation Americans. It was a diverse, middle class area.

Q: Was your school a public school?

MAZEL: I went to parochial school until junior high school, and then I went to a public school junior high. I then went on to a special school called the Bronx High School of Science, which required a very challenging and selective entrance exam.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the parochial school.

MAZEL: It was a Jewish parochial school, a Jewish day school called Kinneret Day School, near Fordham Road in the Bronx, so I had to take a bus to get there every day. My mother taught there so we traveled together to and from the school.

Q: Was it good preparation for the public school for you?

MAZEL: It was fine. The public school was a big change because everyone going to the parochial school was Jewish, then I was put into public school and had to deal with people of every race and religion. It was a change, but I felt prepared.

Q: Once you get to high school, do you become interested in specific subjects? I realize you're going on to a science high school; what was the reason you chose a science high school?

MAZEL: It's one of the specialized schools in New York, one of the top high schools in New York City, and it's very selective. It's in the Bronx; there are other ones in Brooklyn and Manhattan, but this was the top school in the Bronx and your parents pushed you to try to get into the Bronx High School of Science because it's quite prestigious. But it's a very competitive place.

Q: You took an entry test for it?

MAZEL: Yes, a special aptitude test you have to take if you want to get into the Bronx High School of Science, Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Tech, and the School of Performing Arts.

Q: OK. Is the curriculum weighted towards science or is that a holdover of an old name?

MAZEL: It's very heavily weighted towards math and science. Although I did OK in those subjects, I was not inclined to go into medicine or chemistry or any of the research fields, although many students that come out of the Bronx High School of Science do in fact go on into the hard sciences.

Q: What about extra-curricular? Were you involved in any of the other activities the school offered?

MAZEL: I played for the school baseball team.

Q: Was it intra-mural, or did you play beyond that?

MAZEL: We played mostly other public high schools in the Bronx. We had both a league of public schools and in the pre-season we played a lot of parochial schools including St. Nicholas Tolentine, Cardinal Hayes, other schools like that. We also played public schools from Manhattan.

Q: A lot of times we find Foreign Service officers had experiences in high school that influenced their interest in international relations. Did that happen to you?

MAZEL: Not at all. I came from a very middle class family. My father was a police officer; my mother was a teacher. I was not exposed to anybody who'd been in the Foreign Service. There were no students at the school whose parents were in the Foreign Service or lived abroad. It's one thing if you're growing up in the Washington DC area and go to public schools where kids have come back from being overseas. I had none of those experiences. I didn't even know that this career existed.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MAZEL: I have one brother who's now an attorney in New York City. He's quite well-traveled and knows the world very well, but we did not have exposure to this kind of life growing up.

Q: Even through foreign language?

MAZEL: I took Spanish as you had to take a foreign language so I took Spanish and also some French.

Q: The foreign language learning didn't give you any more awareness of the wider world?

MAZEL: I think I always had this tendency towards things foreign. When I was a very small child, I liked to draw maps. I used to look at the maps of all the different countries and then replicate them. There was always some interest in the world outside. But listen – when you grow up in the south Bronx of New York City, going to Manhattan is a big deal; it's quite an insular world.

Q: Speaking of going to Manhattan – did you have opportunities to visit all the museums that can open doors to other windows and other cultures?

MAZEL: I did. We took school trips to places. But again, we didn't do a lot of family trips because my father was a police officer and worked very odd hours, and on weekends could be working four to 12 or eight to four shifts. I have to say, we didn't as a family do a lot of travel; we took maybe one road trip a year. Neither of my parents ever stepped foot on an airplane. I came from a pretty insular background.

Q: So now as you approach the end of high school, you're thinking about college?

MAZEL: Yep. The problem is, because 100% of the students at the Bronx High School of Science go on to college, you had a limited number of applications. Unlike other schools where you could apply to as many as you want, at Science they would only process three applications plus one for City University. So, I only had four bites at the apple. I got into two, didn't get into two. Thought I was going to get a baseball scholarship for one as the coach at Cornell was interested in me. When I graduated, there was kind of a quota at Ivy League schools for the number of Jewish kids they were going to take from Bronx Science. This was the way it was.

Q: What year did you graduate?

MAZEL: I graduated high school in 1968.

Q: The quotas were still there even in the late '60s?

MAZEL: Yes. Cornell University was only going to take X number of smart Jewish kids from Bronx Science; that was the way of life at that time.

Q: You said you applied to four, got into two?

MAZEL: I got into Stony Brook University and City University of New York. I chose Stony Brook University so I wouldn't have to live at home.

Q: Where's that located?

MAZEL: Long Island.

Q: Were you able to commute to college?

MAZEL: No, I lived at the college. It was about two hours from the city.

Q: What kind of campus was Stony Brook in the late '60s when you were there?

MAZEL: It was very politically active and a hot-bed of Anti-Vietnam War activity.. We had a lot of demonstrations, and a lot of people were into drugs. I was the only person I knew who got through four years of college without using any drugs. I was not going to be influenced by others; everybody around me was smoking dope all the time but I just didn't find that very interesting, and I was busy doing a lot of other things.

Q: As you enter college, you're leaving a relatively constricted environment. Now you're going to a much larger environment. What sort of kids were in Stony Brook?

MAZEL: Mostly New Yorkers like me, first or second-generation Americans, many with parents who hadn't gone to college. My parents had gone to college, but many of my colleagues were the first generation in their family to go to college. They were smart kids; all of my friends with the exception of one or two are either doctors or professors. I was the only one to go off in a different direction. They were smart and determined and successful.

Q: Once you get into college, what subjects begin attracting you?

MAZEL: It was always political science. But I also took interesting courses – African-American history, Puerto Rican history. I grew up in a multicultural neighborhood so I thought it would be interesting to take courses in those other areas and understand the history that my friends experienced.

Q: Political science remained your major throughout college?

MAZEL: Right.

Q: Were you involved in other campus activities?

MAZEL: I was freshman, junior, and senior class president and played four years of varsity baseball. I was captain of the baseball team my senior year.

Q: Had you been in student government in high school?

MAZEL: No, I didn't run in high school, but in college people asked me to run. I used to organize a lot of parties and events, and people said, "Why don't you run?" So, I ran freshman, junior, senior class and I was captain of the baseball team.

Q: That's quite a bit of work on top of classes.

MAZEL: And I also wrote for the school newspaper, as a sportswriter. And I organized some big festivals on campus, and also did eight different intramural sports – basketball, soccer, touch football, squash, handball, track. I was very active, very busy. That's why I didn't do any drugs. It was a big deal to be stoned, but I was too busy doing other things and really had no interest in drugs.

Q: Absolutely! And of course, in the news Stony Brook had some fame as a locus for protest against the Vietnam War?

MAZEL: Correct. There were a lot of protests against the war. It was a very active campus, with chapters of the Students for a Democratic Society and other similar organizations. I just was not an activist at the time.

Q: Did college give you a chance to travel at all?

MAZEL: I did sell charter flights so I had earned a free ticket on KLM to Europe after my sophomore and junior years so I had my first experiences backpacking abroad.

Q: You remained in the area?

MAZEL: My problem was – I regret that I didn't do a semester abroad, but playing baseball I had fall and spring seasons, and I would have to give them up. At the time, I was very focused on playing baseball. In hindsight, I wish I had done a semester abroad.

Q: Are there other things that college introduced you to that were useful for you later on as you moved into the working world, as you began to think about international service?

MAZEL: I think what prepared me most for international service was growing up in New York City and being around people of different ethnicities, and making me very streetwise which meant that operationally I felt I could go anywhere in the world and figure things out very quickly, like who's the bad guy and which is the bad neighborhood. Growing up, walking the streets of New York and going to different neighborhoods makes you very streetwise. Also as a very curious kid, from a very young age I would wander around different ethnic neighborhoods in New York. Even when I was at university, I would always take my dates into the city to go to Chinatown and Little Italy and walk around. Very often, they had not been exposed to these areas, so they were very curious and I could show off "my New York."

Q: So, how did you do overall in college? Did you graduate close to the top of your class? Was that important to you at the time?

MAZEL: I was so busy but I did pretty well nonetheless. Then I was nominated by the university president for a Rhodes scholarship. I didn't pursue the process, but I was nominated. He wanted me to go for a Rhodes scholarship. In hindsight, I was kind of a big deal there. I didn't think of myself at the time, but having been freshman-junior-senior class president, organizing all the things – commencement address printed in the program as senior class president. So yeah, I did pretty well. I was a guy who didn't have a lot of time to study, so I crammed it all in at the end of the semester. I did pretty well in my core areas, I got an A in every political science course I took; I think I got one C in my college career, in freshman psychology.

Q: What made you turn down the Rhodes scholarship?

MAZEL: I don't know. I just felt not ready to go to London at the time. I came out of a parochial background… I didn't turn it down; I didn't go through the process of applying, even though I had a nomination letter from the president. That was unsolicited; I did not ask him to do that. He just offered and said he wanted to nominate me.

Q: It says a great deal that the president of the university is aware of your skills and academic record to think you would make a good candidate.

MAZEL: To be honest, I didn't know a lot about this. I grew up in the south Bronx; we didn't know a lot about Rhodes scholarships and things like that. It sounds parochial, but that's my background.

Q: As you're approaching the end of college, what are you thinking about next?

MAZEL: I was thinking about law school. Growing up Jewish in New York City, in the Bronx, your parents think there are only two professions for you: lawyer or doctor. That's just the nature of being a Jew in New York City. So, I went to law school for a year, but it was a very traumatic year. My father was sick and passed away. It was just a very bad year. It was the McGovern-Nixon election, and the Vietnam War. I had been drafted but since I had some baseball injuries, I was declared 4F (unfit for service). The whole time was very traumatic for me.

Q: Which law school?

MAZEL: Albany Law School, for one year. I have to say, it was not a good year. I was involved in working for the McGovern campaign in Albany as a ward organizer and unfortunately, McGovern lost very badly. Midway through the year, I decided I wanted to apply for another graduate program.

Q: What field?

MAZEL: Government and political communications at Boston University School of Public Communications. So, after one year of law school, I went off to graduate school in Boston.

Q: What kind of program did they have? How did they foresee their graduates working?

MAZEL: A lot of them went into government and corporate public relations, communications field, journalism, those areas. In that environment, I had a lot of international friends and my closest friends were Ethiopian, Iranian, Colombian and Thai.

Q: This is 1973?

MAZEL: Correct.

Q: Already, there were significant communities of Iranians and Ethiopians at least as students?

MAZEL: I gravitated to them because I found them interesting. And Thai – I had this deal with my Thai friend that was basically, "I'll help you with course work and show you around Boston and you have to make me Thai food." It worked out really well for both of us as I helped him get through the course work despite his language challenges.

Q: What skills or abilities did it give you that looking back helped your professional career, helped you take your next step?

MAZEL: Writing certainly. Also learning how to deal and communicate with different audiences. Also putting together programmatic plans for communications. We did a lot of projects. One was for the Nature Conservancy; we put together a public relations plan. We had a lot of nonprofits that came to BU (Boston University) at this part of the program and asked students to put together public relations plans for them.

Q: You're now talking about the mid-'70s when a lot of these new public-oriented associations were burgeoning.

MAZEL: Especially on environmental issues, subsequent to the creation of Earth Day. A lot more cognizance of women's issues and environmental issues. We did a number of programs for environmental groups.

Q: That takes you from 1973 to 1975, a two-year program. Where do you think you're going next?

MAZEL: At the end of it, through a contact, I was offered a position with a member of Congress from the 6th congressional district, Michael Harrington, in his district office in Salem.

Q: This is Massachusetts?

MAZEL: Massachusetts, yes. I was living in Cambridge and got the job offer for Salem, Massachusetts. I'd commute every day from Cambridge to Salem and work as a press secretary and administrative assistant to the congressman, Michael Harrington.

Q: Describe him.

MAZEL: Liberal Democrat; anti-war and very progressive on most issues.

Q: Didn't he run…?

MAZEL: No, that's a different Michael Harrington. There was the Socialist Michael Harrington.

Q: That's who I was thinking of. The congressman would also come up, and you were his aide while he was there going out to the constituency?

MAZEL: I would do all of his communications; any letter that came in, I would draft a reply. I worked closely with the Washington office to draft and issue press releases on different local issues. I knew the local media environment well enough to know that a lot of my local press releases were just used in their entirety; they just plugged them right in as local papers needed filler copy. I learned that some journalists are pretty lazy, and papers need articles to fill their pages. There's a lot of district and community newspapers that are just filler for advertising; I knew which ones. I knew if I wrote it, they would use it. It was like a Field of Dreams kind of thing. I was a pretty prolific writer, so I wrote a lot of press releases.

Q: How long did Harrington remain in Congress?

MAZEL: I worked '75 through '77.

Q: He continued in Congress?

MAZEL: Yes, he continued.

Q: But you worked for him until 1977?

MAZEL: I think that's it.

Q: What made you leave?

MAZEL: I left to form my own political consulting agency.

Q: Now that's a pretty big step, to form your own business. You judged that at least in that region, you had enough contacts to be able to?

MAZEL: Yes, and I also had a niche market. It was a consultant for small campaigns. Rather than try to work for large campaigns, I got a number of small, local campaigns taking small fees and making money on advertising I purchased. When you place ads in papers or on radio, you get 15%. I was making money on a lot of little bits and pieces. Plus, getting rich was never my kind of thing. I just wanted to elect people I thought would be good.

Q: Can you give any examples of your clients?

MAZEL: I had state senators and state representatives. During my entire 10-year consulting, I did 43 election campaigns.

Q: Wow.

MAZEL: I was doing them during graduate school, too. Congressman Ed Markey (he's now a senator from Massachusetts). Lots of state senators and district attorneys and aldermen and city council of Cambridge, the Progressive slate of candidates for Cambridge. State representative Ann Gannett, state representative Rick Rhodes. Many, many candidates.

Q: Were there particular issues that you became a real specialist in?

MAZEL: No. I wouldn't say I was a specialist, but I was very good at communicating in a positive way. I never did negative advertising. I was just very good at understanding audiences and determining what issues they would be voting on..

Q: Your consultancy grows?

MAZEL: It did very well. I had a partner. I did most of the writing, and he was the photographer; then we had graphic designers and printers that we hired as needed. It was a little like *Mission Impossible*; for each campaign I would choose a different designer or others as needed to carry out the work.

Q: Back then, pre-computer, so a lot of this would go to printers?

MAZEL: All typesetters, the typesetting had to print out type, arrange it on a page. All before computers.

Q: That also meant you had to manage the time it took for all those things to happen, because everything took a bit longer and you had to review every piece of data because unlike on a computer, you can't go back.

MAZEL: I had to look at every brochure. I would conceptualize how I wanted a brochure to look and translate that to the designer. She would use different typefaces; we would look at typeface and decide, look at headlines and photographs, and work on everything. Then I would physically take it to the printer and pick it up and take the design for the

campaign button to the guy who did the buttons and take the designs for the bumper stickers and house signs and the rooftop signs for cars to the silk screen printer in Lowell, Massachusetts – so I was constantly going around.

Q: It sounds like most of your campaigns were successful.

MAZEL: Yeah, my record was 35-8.

Q: You've really begun to have a grip on this kind of political messaging. In your consultancy, have you begun to think of things beyond it?

MAZEL: Oh yeah. If I'd continued in that – I was written up in newspapers a lot, I could have had a very successful career as a political consultant, probably gone on to be one of these people you see on TV as a political consultant or pundit. But I grew tired of politicians and politics after a point. I learned about the Foreign Service and that kind of career, so I enrolled in the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Q: How did you find out about the Foreign Service?

MAZEL: I was working for the congressman and somebody called to ask me when the Foreign Service exam was being offered. I didn't even know what that was, so I researched it and learned that there's another career out there.

Q: You're taking the profit from your consultancy and spending it on a fairly expensive graduate school?

MAZEL: Yes and no. It wasn't that expensive, and I had a research assistantship and a teaching assistantship, so I had two things that paid a lot of my way. Plus, I was living at a house where my rent was only $100 a month because we got it cheap. I made it go; I had no debt. I was always a low maintenance kind of guy.

Q: Talk a little about Tufts.

MAZEL: Tufts, Fletcher School – it was great. I was completely immersed in an international setting, with friends from the United States and all over the world. It was wonderful for me to learn about different people from different countries and learn about their societies.

Q: What year did you start?

MAZEL: Seventy-eight. But I popped in and out. I'd go to Fletchers for a couple of semesters, then pop out to do some campaigns and make some more money.

Q: They were OK with that? How long did it take for you to graduate?

MAZEL: I didn't get my degree. I did all my coursework but didn't write my thesis because I got into the Foreign Service. And since I already had a master's degree from Boston University, I wanted to start my Foreign Service career.…

Q: So you take the Foreign Service exam in '78?

MAZEL: No, I took it in '82 I think or '83. It must have been late '82 or early '83. I passed the first time.

Q: At that time, when you passed the exam, did they offer you a job in a specific cone or was that one of the moments where you entered and subsequently you would be assigned?

MAZEL: No, I chose political cone.

Q: So you enter the Foreign Service in the political cone. You entered thinking the political cone was best for you even though you knew about USIA (United States Information Agency) and the whole public relations aspect?

MAZEL: Yes. It was interesting. People always told me, "You should be a public diplomacy officer," because I had creative ideas. I would look at every issue and say why don't we do it this way? Not the standard narrow political officer. Political officers sometimes can be very good at reporting but narrowly focused; I always had a more expansive view of how we should and could do things. It was very early in my career when people said, "You should be a PD (public diplomacy) officer, you should work for USIA." At that time, there weren't any of these crossover assignments. I would have loved to have done a USIA tour. I thought USIA people had the best jobs in the embassy.

Q: After 15 years as a political officer, I switched cones and entered the public diplomacy field for the same reason.

MAZEL: Yeah – I thought they had the best job in the embassy. I did a PD tour in Cape Town but I always remained a Political Officer. The PD tour in South Africa was one of my best assignments.

Q: Back to the entry into the Foreign Service. You entered in '84.

MAZEL: January of '84.

Q: By then, you knew what it was about – that you'd be assigned to foreign countries. What were you thinking in terms of geographic area, did you have any in mind?

MAZEL: Yes. In '82 and '83 I was involved with an organization called Operation Crossroads Africa, and I led a group in Taita Hills in Kenya; it was like a mini-Peace Corps.

Q: Who funded it?

MAZEL: Crossroads Africa was a precursor to the Peace Corps, an organization developed by Reverend Robinson. Actually, the Peace Corps was modeled on Operation Crossroads Africa. I led a group to the Taita Hills in Kenya. That really piqued my interest in Africa; I really had a great time. So, when the bid list came out for my class, I picked Mali – the most exotic place on the list – and I bid it number one. I don't know if anybody else even bid on it in my class; it was a no-brainer where I was going to go because I bid it number one.

Q: Did you train in French language to go to Mali?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: They gave you the full French course.

MAZEL: No, I had some French before. I think I had maybe three months of French. Then some GSO (general services officer) training.

Q: The job was a GSO job?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: You're going to a place where a GSO has to be as creative as anywhere in the world. What was that first tour like?

MAZEL: First, I was the only diplomat ever to arrive in Mali by train, because I decided to fly Pan Am to Dakar, Senegal, and then I got a message, a cable from the embassy saying, "Mr. Mazel, please don't take the train." But I took the train anyway. I was still a bit of a rebel. I took the train; it broke down twice. I arrived in Bamako; there was nobody there to meet me. I didn't know the Foreign Service, I didn't know people meet you at the airport. So, when I got into Bamako – I was traveling with my girlfriend at that time, which was also a bit of a taboo; non-married people were not accepted at that time. Anyway, we both arrived in Bamako, after the train broke down twice. It was quite an experience – wonderful, but also awful at the same time. I arrived in Bamako and we just went to a hotel, and the next day showed up at the embassy with my bags. It was like, "Who are you?" "I'm Lou Mazel." "Oh, we didn't know when you were coming!"

They took me to my house, and life started.

Q: Go back one second. You have a girlfriend at this point. She knows you're going to Africa. Had she had any experience in Africa?

MAZEL: She grew up abroad. Her father was involved in international education. So, she'd lived in Pakistan and some other places. She was adventurous like me; she was my girlfriend because she was adventurous. If she wasn't willing to go, she wouldn't have been my girlfriend.

Q: A lot of times people have this wonderful image that they're going to Timbuktu or some exotic place and they get there and find there are a lot of hardships and maybe it's not exactly what they hoped for. You knew what you were getting into; you had been to Africa once before. You had enough coping skills that it was a fine thing from your point of view to take on that job.

MAZEL: I can live anywhere. I grew up in New York City; you can put me anywhere and I'd do fine.

Q: Not everyone can say that. It's a unique preparation for work overseas and a really important skill to have if you're in the Foreign Service. One question: before joining the Foreign Service when you worked for Crossroads Africa, did you ever consider joining the Peace Corps?

MAZEL: Not really. I didn't know a lot about the Peace Corps. If I'd known more, maybe I would have gone in that direction. Again, the neighborhood I grew up in, there was nobody in the Peace Corps. I grew up in a very insular, inner city area; people weren't talking about living and working overseas. Parents of my friends worked in supermarkets, dry cleaners, or as taxi drivers. This is the neighborhood I grew up in.

Q: It's 1984 by now and you arrive in Mali. What are your requirements and goals?

MAZEL: I was doing GSO work. Everybody was very nice to me when I arrived and I thought, "Wow, these people are wonderful" until I realized that there would be a work order that would come right after a dinner invitation. So, I'd be invited to somebody's house for dinner and then they wanted a chair or couch re-covered or something. I realized it was a bit of a pay-to-play aspect going on. I got a little resentful of that for a while, because every time I got an invitation it was followed by a work order, often an unreasonable ask.

What I also did was volunteer to go to the most remote part of the country; they needed people to assess drought conditions. While we had political and economic officers, they didn't seem to want to travel to the most remote parts of the countries, which involved two-day trips in an un-air-conditioned Land Rover with two boxes of K-rations and two boxes of water. Being the adventurous type – there was no armored vehicle, just a Land Rover and a driver, and off I went to the most remote northern regions of Mali to observe drought conditions, meet with local officials, and do reporting.

Q: This is the '80s. Mali has its own political issues, but were there activities by not necessarily terrorist groups but other groups – irredentist groups like in Western Sahara or something like that?

MAZEL: Not really. Today, you couldn't go to the places I went to. Now, they kidnap people in those areas. I didn't have a concern in the world. I used to camp in the desert with the Tuaregs, speaking French to the one person in the tribe who could speak French

to learn about their lifestyles and what they were doing. Again, I was a very adventurous guy. Surprised I survived 32-and-a-half years in the Foreign Service given my expeditionary proclivities! Then again, Africa was a different world in the 1980s.

Q: Did your girlfriend accompany you?

MAZEL: Not on the trips north; she stayed in Bamako. These were work trips and I didn't feel it was appropriate to take a girlfriend along.

Q: Sure. You went to take a look at drought, and desertification was a major issue then and now. What did you find?

MAZEL: I discovered a whole region of the country where there was no foreign assistance at all, and people were in really bad shape. I went back and reported it to the DCM (deputy chief of mission) who then reported it to the ambassador. We had a meeting; we called in World Vision and said, "Can you do something in Menaka, in the Gao region? People are in really bad shape and there's no assistance there." We got them to agree to come in. We also got the military Army Corps of Engineers to agree to erect a pontoon bridge across the Niger River so that grain could be transported; otherwise it would be hard to get grain up to that region because grain was being trucked in and it was taking too long for the much-needed food assistance to get across the river by these little dug-out canoes. I was in charge of working as liaison with the Army Corps to make this all happen.

What happened was, even though I was GSO, I volunteered for all these other things. You know how it is in the Foreign Service; someone steps forward and says, "I'll go to the most remote region of the country and do this," your superiors say "Fine, go ahead."

Q: It also gave you a window on the ethnic and language differences that exist in the country. How did you analyze that?

MAZEL: Mali was a very diverse country. The north with the Tuaregs, and you had the Peul and the Bambara. It was fascinating seeing the different ethnic groups. I would drive around and stop at every village market. In Africa, some places have market day every day of the week, so I'd be driving and come across a couple of towns having their market days. I'd stop at every one, and I'd eat the local food, walk through every stand, look at what they were selling. I would buy stuff. You have to have an intellectual curiosity for this business. If you don't, it's the wrong business for you.

Q: You were also a help to the embassy in trying to figure out what the goals or aspirations were of the different ethnic groups?

MAZEL: I wasn't doing political work, but I was doing reporting on drought conditions and I would prepare my cables after my trips. But I was doing it as a GSO.

Q: Back in the capital, besides the smaller GSO maintenance, did you have a large responsibility buying a warehouse or something?

MAZEL: No, I didn't have huge responsibilities. We rotated, so the first part I was doing property, then I was doing procurement and maintenance. Pretty mundane stuff, but that's what entry-level officers do; they put you in GSO or on the visa line.

Q: This being your first tour, was it a year-and-a-half or two years?

MAZEL: Year and a half.

Q: You would still have to fulfill your consular requirement. Before we end your tour in Mali, were there any other aspects of the job or life in Mali you wanted to share?

MAZEL: Yes. I organized an embassy softball team and played in tournaments all over West Africa. I played in Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, the Dakar tournament, Ouga (Ouagadougou), and Niamey. We won championships in a number of these places.

Q: Were those just among the international community, or did locals take part?

MAZEL: Mostly internationals. AID (U.S. Agency for International Development) and State people, Marines and others. I was on the traveling team, so I traveled to at least four tournaments. We flew to Abidjan and Dakar, we drove to Ouga and Niamey.

Q: Baseball gives you even more of a window into West African life.

MAZEL: Yeah, well those tournaments are a big deal. We had good ballplayers.

Q: They definitely wanted you to go to these games. One more question. While you're off doing all these fascinating things, what is your girlfriend doing?

MAZEL: After about six months, she wanted to get married and I was a non-committal individual at that time. So, she went back to the States.

Q: I just wondered, sometimes spouses or spousal equivalents become very involved in life in the capital.

MAZEL: It was harder for her because we were the only unmarried couple there. At that time in the Foreign Service, people were looked down on if you weren't married.

Q: Absolutely. And there were no benefits for non-spousal partners. You're approaching the end of your tour; what are you thinking about?

MAZEL: I'm thinking this is fun and looking forward to the next tour. I got offered a job in Martinique. At the time I didn't know, but it had a really difficult consul-general there who was a smart guy but a hard guy to work for, a tough boss. So, nobody wanted the

job. I didn't research bosses, I just figured I can work for anybody. And Martinique seemed interesting and I had French so why not?

Q: This would be for your consular tour?

MAZEL: I was back-up consular.

Q: The job was GSO?

MAZEL: No, it was pol (political), econ (economic), PD, back-up communicator and back-up consular. A real jack-of-all-trades assignment.

Q: My goodness.

MAZEL: Pol/econ/PD/commercial, liaise with Navy and Coast Guard ship visits, drug interdiction programs – everything.

Q: Certainly gives you a wonderful opportunity to acquire a lot of skills and look broadly at life there. You bid on it, you got it.

MAZEL: Yeah, because nobody else wanted to go there.

Q: At the end of your tour in Mali, were you recognized with an award? Because honestly, the kind of stuff you're doing is kind of far in addition to…

MAZEL: Yes, I got a nice award.

Q: … to what would typically be a first-tour officer. So, you're going to Martinique.

MAZEL: That was pretty cool. Again, a very small post, but I was responsible for Martinique, Guadalupe, French Guiana, St. Martin, Saint-Barthélemy.

Q: Did you travel then?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: Talk a little bit about what the population was like in these little French colonies.

MAZEL: It was a very interesting population. They were complex as I recall, because they didn't know if they were French or Caribbean. They still got all their direction and money from France, but they were Caribbean people. They weren't the friendliest folks, but I think they were resentful of people from the metropole, the French from France living there, the military, others. It was like a colony in many ways. It was an overseas department of France. So, there was some resentment there towards the French coming from France.

Q: French Guiana? I have to admit I don't know a soul who has been to French Guiana.

MAZEL: I used to go there and report. The French were very suspicious of me, because they had their launch pad in Kourou. It was a pretty strange settlement; they had Hmong settled from Laos there. It was an interesting, very strange place. However, I got to sample some very interesting food in French Guiana including Puma. (I still regret that.)

Q: Was there any industry or business going on other than what France was putting into it?

MAZEL: It's just tourism in Martinique – cruise ships and tourism. They get lots of cruise ships. And they make rum there. That was kind of it: rum, tourism, sugar cane.

Q: What were the issues if you're political, economic, public diplomacy and all of that?

MAZEL: First of all, we had a lot of ship visits. We had a lot of U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ship visits. That was drug interdiction. At that time, that was the route for drugs coming up from Colombia and we were sharing intel with the French on suspect ships..

Q: This is now '86?

MAZEL: Eighty-six to '88.

Q: Ship visits of course draw on your GSO skills because so much of it relates to getting the ship into port and regulations for people to come off, and all of the needs of the ship and so on.

MAZEL: Yeah, but they also asked me for guest lists for their receptions on-board. Being a single guy, I had the guest list include some rather attractive women. They were my contacts, people I knew. So, the ships were very pleased that I would bring the most beautiful women in Martinique to the ship. Their officers were falling all over themselves to welcome the guests I would invite to the ship. A lot of ship visits, a lot of receptions. Then I would arrange for the officers to be able to go down to the Club Med for the day for free, and we had softball and volleyball exchanges. They loved that. They loved me because they came into port and had a great time because I arranged all this stuff for them, using the contacts I had developed on the island. I was a very outgoing and creative guy, so I made things happen.

Q: What about your relationship with your difficult boss?

MAZEL: He was a difficult boss, but he respected me. I was a good writer – he was a very good writer and editor. I had good analytical skills and was an activist. I was never a guy allergic to work so I always did more than was required. I was never a lazy guy, so he didn't have to push me to get work out of me. He respected me. He's a difficult guy in some ways, but I did my best to get along with him.

Q: As you're working into the whole Foreign Service culture and life, you are taking on so far in each post a fair amount of voluntary things above and beyond what would typically be in your work requirements. What about work-life balance; were you satisfied with that?

MAZEL: I had a very beautiful French béké girlfriend whose parents were from the white settler community. I think it was mixed parentage. I had lots of good friends, and interesting work so I had a great life. Very fulfilled.

Q: You didn't end up with island fever from being in too small a place?

MAZEL: If I did, I would go out to the airport and talk to people who had small airplanes and hitch a ride to St. Lucia or Dominica. Being a resourceful guy, I would find people who had planes and were going places and say, "Can I ride with you to St. Lucia?" Then buy my ticket back or get a ride back.

Q: You get to know a bit more of the Caribbean that might be expected just from being assigned to Martinique.

MAZEL: I went for my official duties to Guadalupe, St. Martin, Saint-Barthélemy. I didn't go a lot to Saint-Barthélemy; maybe I should've because now it's a playground for the rich and famous. I would go to Guadalupe and do reporting, or go for a ship visit. I got to know the Caribbean. For pleasure I'd go to St. Lucia or Dominica. I played in a softball tournament in Barbados.

Q: A little bit of the English speaking Caribbean. Did you ever get to the bigger islands? Santo Domingo, Haiti?

MAZEL: I did Haiti on the way down because I was a PD officer and did consultations in Haiti on the way down. The mother ship was in Haiti at that time.

Q: You've now fulfilled your consular requirement under personnel terms and you've had a tour in Africa and a tour in the Caribbean. What are you thinking about now?

MAZEL: Washington was trying to say I had to go back to Washington. Being on the rebellious side, I bid on a job in Lomé, Togo. I found if you're bidding on jobs nobody else wants, you can go.

Q: Always been true in the Foreign Service. Was there something in particular about Togo that attracted you?

MAZEL: I didn't want to go back to DC yet. I'm an expeditionary diplomat, I realize that. I'm now at the end of my career; the term "expeditionary diplomacy" was made for me. I'll go anywhere. Lomé was OK. Sounded interesting. Small country; compared to its neighbors at the time it was actually doing pretty well even though it was under a dictator

then a nascent democracy. But Ghana was under Rawlings and not doing so well, and Benin was this Marxist-Leninist state, so Togo looked pretty good.

Q: This is 1988?

MAZEL: Nineteen-eighty-eight to ’90.

Q: Direct transfer. You don’t need language training. What job do you go to?

MAZEL: I was an economic-commercial officer, and consular. I did all the visa adjudications and did economic and commercial reporting and commercial advocacy.

Q: Did you divide your day?

MAZEL: We were only open for visas a few days a week. There weren’t a lot of Togolese going to the States. The people going to the States pretty much were Nigerian business people who were involved in textiles, used clothing, used shoes, and poultry parts.

Q: Who for whatever reason wanted to get their visa in Togo?

MAZEL: They lived in Togo, doing business there.

Q: What did they have you do as an econ-commercial officer in Togo?

MAZEL: Several things. First, there was a project being funded by TDA (Trade and Development Agency) to create an industrial free zone.

Q: It’s under Commerce if I remember right.

MAZEL: I think so, or it may be an independent agency. They had this plan to do a duty-free industrial zone (Zone Franche), so I was the spearhead on that. Then I decided I wanted to grow U.S. exports. I would walk around the marketplace and talk to everybody who was selling textiles and say “Do you want to import from the U.S.?” I would get their contact information, and I created two lists: one of U.S. companies who were exporting textile products, and the second of Togolese and Nigerian business people, and I’d pair them up.

Q: That sounds easy, but for an American exporter to get goods to Togo, did you need to go to the Ex-Im Bank (Export-Import Bank of the United States)?

MAZEL: No, I just put them together and facilitated. A lot of the importers would go to the States and look at the lots there. Look at the textiles, at the used clothing and shoes. They knew their market. They paid for stuff; they didn’t need funding. When I got there, U.S. exports to Togo were $18.6 million; when I left, they were over $27 million. Small amounts, but it was Togo. They were not going to buy Boeing aircraft or heavy

machinery. They were going to buy turkey tails and poultry parts and used clothing, shoes and textiles. This was the market.

Q: How developed was the market in Togo? Were they getting letters of credit, or were things done more on handshakes and verbal agreements?

MAZEL: Handshakes and verbal agreements, and people would go to the States with a lot of cash and pay for things and bring shipping containers back. I also got a supermarket there to import U.S. grocery products. Because there are a lot of missionaries in the country and they were always asking me “Where can we get American food products?” So, I got a supermarket to do a deal with an American food exporter to bring in American food products. I told all the missionaries, “Listen, there’s a container coming in, so get there soon.” The Togolese guy who ran the supermarket, when he brought in a container of American products, he could sell everything he brought in. He was not very well capitalized, so he brought in the first container and paid for it and then he wanted credit for the next one. I didn’t want to get involved in that negotiation between the supplier in the U.S. and the supermarket owner.

Q: That’s why I wondered how much potential there was to go beyond cash?

MAZEL: There was potential, but it was not for me as an American officer to be writing letters of guarantee for anybody; let them work it out. But I was able to convince a local supermarket guy that if he brought in American products, people would buy them. There’s always Americans who want to buy American products. He was not a well-capitalized guy so I don’t know what happened after I left the country. Turkey parts – I had the Commerce trade statistics, so I knew exactly what was coming in. Used clothing, used shoes, textiles.

Q: What about life in Lomé at the time. Besides the export thing, did you take on other activities?

MAZEL: I played softball and toured around West Africa. I organized a team comprising embassy people, Peace Corps volunteers, and missionaries. I found out my most reliable players were missionaries because they were good ballplayers and they didn’t go out partying the night before. We had an 8:00 AM game in Ouaga and they would be there on-time, unlike the Peace Corps volunteers, who would go out and drink and party the night before; you never knew if they were going to show up for the game or not. It was pretty stressful not knowing if my center fielder or some of my other ball players were going to be there because they were out partying. But the missionaries? If I could have a full team of Baptist missionaries, I’d be winning tournaments all over Africa.

Q: For you these expeditionary tours were enjoyable, you’re putting together good accomplishments. But you also know that these are accomplishments based on your force of will. Were they sustainable? Did you know whether any of the commercial ties you created continued?

MAZEL: What happened after that, somebody at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) who was teaching a course on commercial diplomacy met me somewhere and he asked me to address his class at FSI on promoting exports in developing countries. So, I developed a presentation called "Turkey Tails in Togo." I gave that speech and they asked me to tape it, and then used that speech in subsequent classes for years. Many people in the Foreign Service knew me because they'd seen that presentation, but they'd never met me. They'd go, "Where do I know you from?" It was because they had taken that commercial diplomacy course at FSI and I was part of the course on being very active and hands-on in how to promote U.S. exports in developing countries.

Q: Excellent. So that's a two-year tour? You've now racked up a solid six years of accomplishment. Are you now thinking Africa was going to be your area?

MAZEL: Yes, I was very comfortable there. I always had a good comfort level in Africa. When I lived in Bamako, I drove to Ouaga and to Niger. When I lived in Lomé I drove up to Burkina Faso and on weekends I would drive to a Chinese restaurant in Accra because they had good Chinese food there. I would journey to a nice mezze place in Cotonou in Benin because I could get a good Lebanese meal there. On the way back I would buy land crabs and my girlfriend at the time, my girlfriend from Martinique, was living with me, so she would make French crab farsi, stuffed crabs, which is a Creole dish. I'm comfortable around people in Africa; never had a bad experience.

Q: Also in the embassy, these are small embassies, they can have wonderful highly motivated people, and they can have complainers. Regardless, you seem to just be able to function.

MAZEL: I organized things. I organized volleyball, softball. I was adaptable and never a complainer and was always positive about everything I did. Yeah, we had a good set-up there. The ambassador and DCM were supportive of what I was doing. Again, they never saw me as a guy they had to push to get work out of; I would always do more than they asked for.

Q: We're now in 1990.

MAZEL: My CDO (career development officer) said you've got to do a tour back in Washington. Since I had done graduate work at Fletcher on refugees and migration policy I looked at refugee positions. There was a job in RP (Refugee Programs), which is the predecessor to PRM (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration). It was RP Asia, doing work on Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao Hmong resettlement. I thought that sounded interesting, so I took that job.

Q: This was the moment in 1990 when the U.S. had begun to process a lot more of the Amerasian children?

MAZEL: Everything – Amerasians, but also people who had been closely associated with the United States during the Vietnam War. Former ARVN (Army of Vietnam), former

families of ARVN, people who worked at the embassy. A lot of these people were at refugee camps throughout Southeast Asia. They escaped by boat; they were commonly referred to as "Vietnamese boat people."

Q: So you're in the bureau and the main processing location was Bangkok?

MAZEL: No, we had Refugee Coordinators throughout Southeast Asia in Malaysia and Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand.

Q: Quite a field of locations for the processing of this group of people. How many would you say there were in 1990?

MAZEL: Probably 50,000 Vietnamese in camps throughout Southeast Asia, Philippines, Palawan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia.

Q: You had your work cut out for you.

MAZEL: The main refugee office was in Bangkok. We had refugee coordinators in a lot of different countries.

Q: What were your main responsibilities?

MAZEL: I was looking at the funding for programs in the camps. Funding for various service providers – Catholic Relief Services, all of these. I wasn't on the resettlement side, I was on the assistance side.

Q: The contracts to them – was RP responsible for the contracts?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: So, you were overseeing contracts your bureau led for the purpose of refugee assistance in that region.

MAZEL: Health. sanitation, education, getting people off drugs (the Lao Hmong were addicted to opium). Yes.

Q: You must have visited periodically the various places to get the ground truth. What did you see when you went?

MAZEL: I saw people who were living in OK conditions but clearly they had left their entire life behind in Vietnam and they were completely focused on resettlement in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, France – the countries that were accepting these refugees at the time. Many of them had very difficult tales in the Communist regime from '75 on. The retribution – it was a tough time for people who had been associated with the U.S. war effort. These weren't the nicest guys who took over in Vietnam.

Q: The U.S. is processing them. In the period of time you're in the RP bureau, how many are coming in per year?

MAZEL: I don't remember the numbers, but there were thousands coming. The Vietnamese were the largest group of people being resettled in that period. I don't have the numbers off-hand.

Q: I just wanted a feeling for how quickly the completion of the entire task was expected to take. In other words, if we have 50,000 or so and Congress is only going to fund up to a certain point and the department is only going to be thinking about processing for a certain number of years, what in general was RP thinking at the time?

MAZEL: The thinking was we had the Amerasian children and we had an obligation to them, because they were the children of American servicemen. We had an obligation to those who fought alongside us, ARVN – the South Vietnamese army. And we had an obligation to those who worked for the U.S. embassy or for our various projects. We're the United States. We're the most generous nation in the world when it comes to these types of issues in terms of refugee resettlement and having an obligation to those who fought with us in Vietnam. I think we were fulfilling our obligation.

Q: Were you satisfied with the work of the contracted groups?

MAZEL: Yes, they were all very committed, dedicated people. A lot of church-based organizations and others; CARE and World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran Refugee Service, and many organizations. These people are fine people who are dedicated to helping vulnerable populations and they still do that now with the Syrian refugees who are coming in also – again, with respect to political rhetoric, deserve an opportunity for a better life.

Q: Beyond Southeast Asia, were you responsible for refugees from other places?

MAZEL: No, I was just in RP/Asia.

Q: All of this work with Southeast Asia. It didn't tempt you as another bureau?

MAZEL: My subsequent tour was in Asia.

Q: It was? I had recalled only the African posts.

MAZEL: No, I went to Malaysia as the refugee coordinator based in Kuala Lumpur..

Q: OK. Now you're a political-coned officer; was that a political job?

MAZEL: It involved a lot of reporting, because I would go to the camps and report on the conditions. Not political per se, but the embassy – again I always volunteered to do things

and the embassy asked me to do the annual Human Rights Report. I never said no to anything.

Q: That was human rights strictly for Malaysia?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: OK. We've not always seen eye to eye on Malaysia on human rights.

MAZEL: Right. And you had Prime Minister Mahathir at the time who was very critical of the West and the U.S. in particular. Not the easiest place to discuss human rights. But the people were wonderful in Malaysia; I never had any problems.

Q: Before we completely leave RP. For those two years in Washington, was anything else going on you want to mention. It's now the first time you've been back after six or seven years overseas. You're re-establishing yourself in the big building.

MAZEL: I played on a State Department softball team in the league. I realized Washington was a wonderful place to be a single guy.

Q: That would really cover your period in RP? It was very focused on one specific thing and that kept you busy for the whole two years. Now it's 1992? And we go on to Malaysia?

Maybe this is a good time to break.

Q: Today is September 29th, and we are continuing our interview with Louis Mazel. Going at this point in 1992, the RP bureau, the Refugees and Population bureau.

MAZEL: I always had an interest in refugee and migration issues. In graduate school at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy I helped edit a book on migration by professor Rosemary Rogers. I thought going back to Washington and working on refugee affairs would be an interesting and rewarding assignment. I was working on RP/Asia which was primarily refugee issues pertaining to the Vietnamese boat people, those who were still in Vietnam in the Orderly Departure Program, as well as Laotian Hmong, lowland Lao, and some Cambodians who were also in refugee camps in Southeast Asia. My portfolio was focused on assistance, looking at the programs being implemented by various partners in the refugee camps, and working to a lesser extent on resettlement issues. Mainly, I was involved on the programmatic side. I would travel out to camps in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Laos to look at conditions on the ground and to look at how well the implementing partners were using U.S. assistance.

Q: You worked with officers in the field as well who were following it while you were in Washington?

MAZEL: Yes. We had regional refugee coordinators in places like Malaysia and we had a large presence in Thailand. I worked with them. They would file reports with me, but it was also important to actually go out and visit and put my eyes on some of the programs to better understand the challenges and the particular issues in the field.

Q: In addition to checking up on the way the funding was being used, did you actually work with the donors? Did you sign the contracts?

MAZEL: No, I was not a contracting officer. I didn't sign; that was done by more senior officials in the RP bureau. But I would make my recommendations based on my evaluation of the proposals as well as the conditions in the field, and the needs being expressed by people working in the field, our Refcoords (refugee coordinators) who were visiting the camps on a weekly basis or more often.

Q: How were the relations in the field between the receiving country governments and the donor organizations that you managed?

MAZEL: There's always a challenge in terms of the history of refugee movements. Some countries made it very clear that they would not accept large numbers of migrants, such as Singapore. Basically, when Vietnamese boat people arrived they would give them water and food, and a map and say, "Go to Indonesia." It was always a challenge getting the receiving countries to accept the Vietnamese boat people.

Q: Did you find that most of the people who were identified or claimed to be under this program fit the requirements of the program? Or did you also have to make determinations about who is actually qualified?

MAZEL: That's a good question. Those decisions were being made by people in the field who were interviewing; very often those refugee coordinators. We had implementing partners who were working with the refcoord office to accept and review asylee applications and to try to identify the U.S. links that would enable them to resettle in the United States. You have to remember; the Vietnamese were being resettled by a number of countries, not just the United States. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, a few other European countries were also resettling Vietnamese migrants, as well as some Lao and Cambodians. But the United States was still by far the largest because of our involvement in the Vietnam War. So, you had to prove one of several types of linkages to be eligible. One is that you fought with or worked for the American military in Vietnam. You or your parent (mostly the father) worked for the ARVN, South Vietnam's army. Or that you had relatives in the United States, so there was an element of family reunification. There were others who they identified among the Vietnamese to ascertain whether they fit into one of these categories. Then they would prepare case files. I didn't do that when I was in Washington; I was really only working on the assistance side.

Q: Was there difficulty with Congress in getting sufficient funding?

MAZEL: At that time there was sufficient funding. I think we felt an obligation to the Vietnamese refugee population. A lot of it involved people who worked closely with the U.S. military and Amerasian children who were fathered by Americans serving abroad and several other categories as well. I think funding was adequate; we never felt we were unable to function.

Q: No great difficulties with Congressional oversight on the program?

MAZEL: Not really. There was bipartisan support for this program.

Q: Your work took you out to these countries. Did you begin thinking of serving there as well?

MAZEL: That was my next tour, so we can move into my next assignment. I was regional refugee coordinator based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 1992 to 1995. There, I was the one looking at these case files and determining whether people were eligible for resettlement in the U.S. It was quite a powerful position. I tried to be very forward-leaning to the greatest extent possible in terms of helping Vietnamese boat people who did have a valid claim to refugee status to the United States to realize their dream. I would also visit the camps. Frequently I would go to the camp in Indonesia – at least once a month. And Malaysia I would go on a weekly basis if not more often because it was not that far from downtown Kuala Lumpur. I'd go to look at conditions, to be visible, to make the refugees understand that I was looking out for their interests, but also to make the local officials very aware that the United States had an interest in how well the refugees were being treated, that they were receiving food and there were educational facilities for the young people. I thought it was important to be there often and be seen.

Q: When it came to all of the camps – how large were they? How big a population are we talking about?

MAZEL: Thousands in these camps. The Galang camp in Indonesia was more spread out. There were thousands; it was a very large facility. Kuala Lumpur also had several thousand; a more tightly packed community but again several thousand Vietnamese. This was a residual population. There were not a lot of new people arriving; these were people who had arrived earlier, many of whom had arrived in a place called Pulau Bidong in Malaysia and then were transferred to this camp at Sungai Besi, which was just outside Kuala Lumpur. We all had interests in ensuring there was a safe future for the asylum seekers, whether it was in a resettlement country or for those not eligible for resettlement, to be able to return to Vietnam and not be persecuted for having left.

Q: None of the countries of first refuge really wanted them to stay?

MAZEL: Local resettlement was not really an option being offered by those countries. They felt it would be a pull factor and then more people would come simply to stay in those countries. I think it was always clear that the ultimate solution would be either resettlement or repatriation. These countries – it took a lot of negotiations to get them to

accept these large numbers. A lot of international support came in and it was necessary to reassure the receiving countries that this would not become their permanent problem, and that the international community would not walk away and dump the problem on them.

Q: Most of the refugees you were dealing with, it was understood these camps would be drawn down eventually to zero?

MAZEL: That's what happened. It was a successful program. People were resettled. Some people returned voluntarily; there's no evidence they were persecuted upon return. The key was ensuring people had a future, whether they were resettled in a third country or back in their own country, Vietnam.

Q: Over the three years, were there unusual episodes of you having to deal with the government or with humanitarian organizations?

MAZEL: There was a major issue that I uncovered. A scheme in Indonesia where local screening officials were in fact demanding sexual favors in return for favorable screening decisions. I uncovered that and raised it with the government and the embassy in Jakarta, and subsequently won a Superior Honor award for uncovering that and reporting it and getting it stopped.

Q: Fantastic. Demanding favors of some kind is always a worry with refugees. Were there also concerns that positions were being sold?

MAZEL: What was being sold were positive screening decisions for sexual favors. The screeners were Indonesian nationals in the Galang camp, looking at people. If they're screened in, they're determined to be eligible for resettlement. Then their case files would be submitted to various resettlement countries, based on the criteria of those countries.

Q: I didn't realize that countries of first refuge would do any of the screening. Is that true in other countries as well?

MAZEL: Singapore was a different situation. It was kind of a closed shop and it didn't let anybody come in to do anything there. The Singaporeans eventually offered the very small Vietnamese refugee population local resettlement. Very quietly done in the true Singaporean way. They deterred further arrivals and took care of the people who were there. Malaysia also had a local screening procedure, but we didn't have the kind of corruption they had in Indonesia.

Q: Three years there. Did you learn any of the languages as part of your tour?

MAZEL: No, I just learned basic Malay to say hello to people, greetings and things like that. Most people spoke English, unless you lived in very rural areas of Malaysia. I knew enough to order food from menus, say some basic greetings and get by. It was very nice. Nice people, nice place to be, a very dynamic economy, so it was a very rewarding tour. I met my wife there – an American woman who was teaching at the International School of

Kuala Lumpur. We got married there and moved on to our next tour in Windhoek, Namibia.

Q: Namibia, that is interesting. You had an Africa background but to go from refugees in Southeast Asia to Namibia is quite different.

MAZEL: As you know, I did two previous tours in Africa, so I was always interested in Africa. I knew the DCM at the time in Windhoek, and it was a great fit for me. A very interesting country, coming out of independence from South Africa just five years earlier after a long liberation struggle. It was a very interesting place to live.

Q: Take one second and describe the country. It looks large on the map but if I understand it right, a lot of it is largely uninhabited.

MAZEL: Most of it is desert. It's twice the size of California. At the time there were only 1.6 million people there, so a very small population. It was the most empty place I've ever been. A lot more animals and livestock than people in the country and very big farms. It was a stunningly beautiful country if you like the desert. It was a wonderful place to be. Very nice weather. Didn't rain much. You had the Namib Desert along the coast. Beautiful country. Really interesting wildlife. A wonderful seal population along the coast, above Swakopmund. Great oysters, great meat, game meat if you like that. Not a lot to do there. We bought camping gear and a Four-Wheel-Drive Nissan Pathfinder and we'd go off camping a couple of times a month. The RSO embassy residence had a volleyball court so we'd all play volleyball at least twice a week there. We had a really good embassy volleyball team and played in a number of national tournaments; we won at least two or three with our embassy team. One tournament had 178 teams, so we did quite well. I played in the Namibia baseball league, as an over-the-hill college baseball player. We won the league championship and we were the only integrated team. We had two or three Black Namibians who learned baseball while studying in Cuba. We made the best of our life in Namibia and made some great lifelong friends..

Q: The one thing you haven't said is, in what job?

MAZEL: I forgot to say – I was political chief.

Q: What were the political issues that were of significance here?

MAZEL: The bilateral relationship, but also, I was in charge of the embassy Democracy and Human Rights Fund and the Ambassador's Self-help Fund. I guess my most notable achievement in Namibia was – I got there and in my first week I was reading a local newspaper, and saw an article about how a rapist had gotten off with a Namibian $100 fine. That was all; he raped somebody and got basically a U.S. $33 fine. I thought this was outrageous. At the same time, I was reviewing our democracy and human rights fund programs, an $80,000 program. I looked and saw we were giving little bits of money for a book project and for this project, and I felt there was no real focus. I met with a group of Namibian women who were similarly outraged about domestic and sexual violence in

the country, violence against women and children. They wanted to do something and so did I. I determined that I would devote the entire $80,000 to a national multi-media campaign on violence against women and children, organized and implemented by Namibian women. Guided and directed by me for ideas on the media and the like, they did radio and television ads, bumper stickers and other public information programs including an insert in the national newspaper. I suggested the themes for a lot of this work, and they launched this campaign to change societal attitudes about sexual and gender violence as well as enact legislation. I was recognized by the State Department and given the first ever worldwide democracy and human rights award for that, the first DRL (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) award.

I guess the greatest satisfaction came when I was leaving the country. One of the last days I was there, I picked up the paper and I was reading a story about a child rapist who was given life imprisonment. It took three years and $80,000 but we changed societal attitudes about sexual and gender violence. I also in my second year decided to focus on destigmatizing HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), because it was a big problem there and nobody would ever declare their HIV status. I directed funding to destigmatize HIV/AIDS; this was again DRL funding. I funded a local Namibian woman filmmaker and with $17,000 she produced a film on the first Namibian woman to ever declare publicly her HIV/AIDS status. It was called *Emma's Story*; it was shown twice on national TV.

It was a major achievement. The film was taken to AIDS conferences all around the world, because the biggest problem with HIV/AIDS was stigma. People would simply not declare their status and as a result, the disease would spread because nobody would ever say "I'm HIV positive" for fear of being harmed or that their husband or wife would walk away.

Q: Windhoek, the capital is in the middle of the country. What sort of city is it? The other thing I'm wondering is, how does Namibia stay afloat? Is it safari tourism? Do they have natural resources?

MAZEL: Resources are diamonds and uranium, fishing and cattle – livestock. Those were the pillars of the economy. They had some tourism as well. Diamonds and uranium kept the country afloat.

Q: No wonder South Africa wanted to keep their hands on it. The majority of people lived in Windhoek or along the coast?

MAZEL: No. they lived in a couple of population centers – Windhoek, Swakopmund, then in small towns, Keetmanshoop, Lüderitz, and the Ovambo area of the northern part of the country – that's probably the most densely populated, along the border with Angola.

Q: So that's where it's reasonably well-watered I would imagine. So much of the rest of the country is desert.

MAZEL: Namib Desert and the Kalahari Desert.

Q: Speaking of the Kalahari, did you conduct much activity with indigenous populations?

MAZEL: Yeah, we did a lot, especially through the ambassador's special self-help fund. I would travel through the country, inaugurating projects, looking at project proposals and implementation. I had a lot of contact with local people.

Q: Did we have a Peace Corps presence?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: What were they doing?

MAZEL: Education, agriculture. A lot to do in community development and education.

Q: And AID?

MAZEL: Yes, we had a USAID presence as well. Doing education, basic services, water and sanitation.

Q*: They typically would also offer opportunities for ground truth when you go out there.*

MAZEL: It's always wonderful to get out and talk. I was an expeditionary diplomat before the term was coined. That was my style. I thought it was more interesting to be in the field than in the office. I like to come back to the office and report back; I thought reporting was very important and I still do. When you reported, to be accurate and current you had to get out and see what was actually going on.

Q: Aside from this, were there any major bilateral or regional issues that took up your time as a political officer?

MAZEL: Really, we were just moving the bilateral relationship forward. There was a lot of suspicion about the United States because we were not on their side during their long civil war. They were best friends with the Cubans and others. In their great struggle for liberation, we were seen as supporters of Apartheid South Africa and by extension, South Africa's reach into Namibia. For a number of these countries coming out of their liberation struggles, the United States was not seen as being on their side, so we had some convincing to do.

Q: Was there a residual Cuban presence?

MAZEL: No, not major. You didn't see a lot of Cubans around Namibia at that time. There may have been some Cuban physicians, but we had no contact with them.

Q: While you were there, was your wife active? Doing development work or?

MAZEL: The first year, she was doing triathlons. She did a lot of races and a team triathlon; they were national champions. Then she did the Argus cycle tour in Cape Town. She was into a lot of endurance sports including cycling, swimming, and running.. Then she got tired of that, so the next year she started working in various positions around the embassy. Part-time; they call them PIT (part-time, intermittent, temporary) positions. She did a lot in the security area accompanying local Namibian employees when they cleaned or did other work in secure areas of the embassy. Then we had a plane crash there; a U.S. military plane crashed with a German military plane. We had a demining team in Namibia; they had just dropped off the team and their equipment and the plane was heading to Ascension Island and collided with a German plane carrying German military dignitaries to an event in Cape Town. One of these weird things where two planes are in the same area at the same time; they'd gotten bad information in terms of what altitude to fly at. We had a search and recovery team come in with over 100 personnel to look for remains of the planes; my wife worked on that project.

Q: Travel from Namibia?

MAZEL: I didn't do any TDY (temporary duty) from Namibia, but I did a lot of overland travel. We did camping trips in Botswana and Zimbabwe. We liked to camp in various game parks; there was Moremi, Chobe, Etosha and other parks including Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. We would take long road trips of 14 hours in length to reach these places..

Q: The only question I have about camping in game parks is – the game. You were never at risk of being eaten by lions?

MAZEL: Yeah! We'd camp at parks that were unfenced. So, yeah. The key thing is one, to never have food in your tent, and two, don't go walking around at night. In Moremi in Botswana we had a honey badger come right into the campsite as I was cooking dinner. In another instance, a honey badger came into the campsite in Namibia and was trying to open the cooler. I guess it wasn't a very smart honey badger because you can't really open a cooler by standing on top of it. Once we were camping in Zimbabwe and a hyena came into the campground; you just retreat to your tent. If you stay in your tent and don't have any food in the tent, you're OK. I learned how to do this.

Q: That would be a major concern. Some of them are big game… they're looking for food, not for you as food but for the prepared food you might have?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: You were there?

MAZEL: Ninety-five to ninety-eight.

Q: Now as you're approaching the end of this tour, what are you thinking about for the next tour?

MAZEL: I wanted to stay in Africa. A good position came up, a pol/economic chief in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, so I went there. Unfortunately, war broke out shortly after I arrived between Ethiopia and Eritrea over disputed territory in Tigray Province, so it was a pretty tough tour.

Q: Before you went, did you get training in Amharic?

MAZEL: No, I didn't.

Q: Was it a direct transfer in '98 to Addis Ababa? Were you able to stay despite the war?

MAZEL: My wife was evacuated when they moved non-essential personnel and family members out. I didn't think the draw-down was justified because according to information we had, Eritrea had no capability of launching strikes on Addis. I think it was a political decision, because we were evacuating the embassy in Asmara, and the Ethiopians did have the capability to attack Asmara, I think somebody in Washington took the decision for purposes of political balance to do the same and draw down in Addis. My wife went back and took the consular course and subsequently became a consular associate. I was left in Addis, cranking out along with my team 82 sitreps (situation reports) on the war.

Q: How long did the war last?

MAZEL: It lasted months. It ebbed and flowed. We tried to keep Washington informed about what we knew, what we could glean about the situation. Information on the war was difficult to obtain from the Ethiopians, who didn't share much

Q: So most of your contacts in Ethiopian ministries and so on spoke English?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: The war ended if I recall with status quo ante?

MAZEL: It ended with the decision that there would be international arbitration by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC), and that ended the war. The agreement was signed in December 2000, after I had left. It's still an unresolved situation; the EEBC came down with the recommendation that the disputed territory belonged to Eritrea, but Ethiopia never vacated the territory.

Q: Where is the territory?

MAZEL: In north-east Ethiopia around the area called Badme.

Q: Aside from that, were there other things going on in the bilateral relationship with Ethiopia that also took up some of your time?

MAZEL: Food assistance was a big issue, and I was helping out with public diplomacy work too. I went with the ambassador to Djibouti to document the arrival of U.S. food aid in Djibouti. We brought Ethiopian journalists down with us and did a photo op to demonstrate to the people of Ethiopia the United States' commitment to assist with food aid.

Q: That was mainly because of the war or were they suffering a drought?

MAZEL: There was a drought. Ethiopia has almost 100 million people. Most people rely on rain for agriculture. If it doesn't rain in every part of the country and people who are basically subsistence farmers – well if it doesn't rain that year, there's a food deficit. There's always a food deficit of one sort or another in Ethiopia. So that and the war took up a lot of my time. It also hampered my ability to visit the country. I didn't get to travel. I'd make plans to visit some place like Lalibela and then it would be cut off because of a threat of war in that area or Ethiopia Airlines would not fly in, so it was kind of frustrating – it was a beautiful country but I was not able to visit as many regions as I would have enjoyed.

Q: How big a city is Addis?

MAZEL: It was crowded. Probably six, seven million when I was there; probably more now. I worked under two very good ambassadors; Ambassador David Shin and Ambassador Tibor Nagy. Both are excellent – different styles, but both really terrific in the way they conducted themselves. It was great. Ambassador Shinn was very traditional in terms of reporting. Lots of cables – and I like writing and getting my staff to write, so I was very happy doing that. I'm very traditional in believing that political and economic reporting is vital.

Q: On the economic side, was there anything else going on?

MAZEL: Ethiopian Airlines was always a very loyal partner for Boeing, so we were always looking to sell Boeing aircraft there. That was our major export. Probably some machinery, medicine, things like that. They were the African launch partner for the 787 in later years. Their pilots were trained by TWA at one time, and Ethiopian Airlines is one of the top African airlines. There's a long history, especially in the aviation sector.

Q: Internal stability in that time was not a major issue?

MAZEL: Not a major issue. I also at one point observed elections down in the Harare area. It was a minority government, repressive in many ways. But also they had elections, and I think they had the interests of the people at heart. There were always issues of ethnicity in Africa that colored elections and governments.

Q: The other thing about Ethiopia is obviously there's a war on, but also it had donated troops for various other conflicts in Africa. Did that go on while you were there?

MAZEL: No. Ethiopia's contributions to peacekeeping were much more substantial later on, although they did have a contingent in Liberia. Their peacekeeping efforts really grew later on in terms of both Sudan and the mission in Somalia.

Q: Are they still in Somalia?

MAZEL: Yes.

Q: So that takes you through that pol/econ chief position in Addis Ababa. Am I missing anything? I realize in a period of time when you're doing sit-reps [situation reports] almost non-stop and then post-war issues, that tends to take up most of a political officer's time.

MAZEL: The war was still going on until I left. The peace wasn't signed until December 2000 and I had already left the country. While I was there, the war was always going on. They drew down the Peace Corps volunteers as well in both countries, Eritrea and Ethiopia. It was a tough period.

Q: That is unfortunate. Relations with other regional countries at the time were not major issues.

MAZEL: No. We had issues with Sudan clearly. Things were OK; subsequently there were more regional issues with South Sudan and Kenya. But at that time terrorism was not a major issue. Though we did have the attacks on our embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, we did not feel in Ethiopia at that time that we were a target.

Q: Now approaching 2000 and thinking about where you're going next. What's on your mind?

MAZEL: Well, an opportunity came up in Cape Town, South Africa. I'd been there when I served in Windhoek. The job was as public diplomacy officer, and I got it. I worked with somebody who recommended me to the CG (consul-general) at that time, so I was able to secure that position.

Q: At this point, where are you in the hierarchy? Are you 01?

MAZEL: I think I was an 02. I don't remember!

Q: I'm just curious because as you move into mid-ranks it's interesting to have an out-of-cone assignment.

MAZEL: Yeah. I always took interesting, challenging assignments. Cape Town was wonderful. We had a very active public diplomacy section. I did a lot in terms of using speakers, doing outreach to the Muslim community, the Western Cape. In fact, I extended twice, so I was in Cape Town as public diplomacy officer from 2000 to 2005.

Q: That's pretty remarkable, not many people get to stay in one place that long.

MAZEL: Yeah, there were people who hated me throughout the State Department because everybody was hoping to go to Cape Town and they couldn't dislodge me. I extended twice and had a great assignment there.

Q: Over this period, what were the key things for public diplomacy?

MAZEL: Obviously, we had 9/11 occur when I was there. We had HIV/AIDS issues, and U.S. contributions to the Global Fund. The global war on terrorism began when I was there so we had a lot of outreach to do, particularly to the large and influential Muslim community in the Western Cape. We had the U.S. presidential elections of 2004; I did a lot of public speaking around that to talk to people about how our elections are conducted. I went all over the Eastern, Western, and Northern Cape, giving presentations on U.S. elections. Spoke to the World Affairs Council of South Africa, to many different groups as well as universities. Also, I did a lot of public speaking on the U.S. contributions on HIV/AIDS, to make people understand what we were doing in terms of our support for HIV/AIDS treatment and detection. It was a very rewarding assignment. I had great people in the consulate there. The Consul-General was Steve Nolan and then Moosa Valli, both terrific people and great colleagues.

Q: Was your wife hired in the consulate?

MAZEL: Yes. She started working a year and a half into our assignment in Ethiopia as a consular associate and was hired in Cape Town as well.

Q: Had she ever thought about joining?

MAZEL: Yes, she actually took the exam twice, passed it twice. She was on the list but both times she didn't get high enough to get called. We had one problem; after 9/11, we had the white powder anthrax thing. What happened was, her acceptance letter was in a pouch that was delayed for five months. So she missed an opportunity for an interview. Because of that, she did not get high enough on the list. I forget the exact sequencing of events, but the letter that told us she passed was in that pouch that was delayed five months somewhere. It was not a sterling period in the State Department's management, not being able to get those pouches somehow cleaned, scanned, decontaminated, whatever.

Q: Oh well. But she was in the meantime working in the consulate in Cape Town. Did we have while you were there Peace Corps and AID?

MAZEL: We had Peace Corps, but not in the Western Cape, partly because the Western Cape was seen as being economically advantaged.

Q: Let's go back to the outreach you did to the Muslim community. What was that like?

MAZEL: I did a lot of things. I identified Muslim participants for IVLP (international visitor leadership programs) programs where they studied American society, tolerance, religion.

Q: How large a community would you say it was?

MAZEL: Tens of thousands. It's huge in the Western Cape. The premier of the Western Cape at one time was a Muslim, Ebrahim Rasool. I created the first-ever iftars in the Western Cape at the ambassador's residence (the ambassador had two residences). I made sure to have lots of Muslim participants at digital video conferences on a whole range of issues – not just Muslim issues, but issues like violence against women and children; community policing; nutrition, health, and HIV/AIDS. I especially made an effort to reach out to Muslim populations to make sure they were mainstreamed into all U.S. public diplomacy programs.

Q: Cape Town itself has a wonderful reputation for being beautiful, but also having high crime. Did that affect you?

MAZEL: Didn't affect me. One is, my father was a police officer so basic safety precautions were always very deeply ingrained in me. I was very careful; I would never have anything visible in my car, I would never open the trunk of my car where people could see. I was careful about where I parked. I made myself an unattractive target for crime; I never had a problem. Everybody else seemed to have problems, but I didn't. I had one incident where somebody hopped the fence at my house and rifled the glove compartment of my car. Looked like they were going to try to take the radio but never did. That was it. I didn't have any issues. When I went hiking, I would never carry a lot of money. I didn't carry any expensive cameras – I just was not interesting as a target.

Q: Also, given that you were there five years, did you begin to develop particular programs or activities that you could see the sustainability of?

MAZEL: I think the Muslim outreach was very important. We did a lot on violence against women and children, similar to what I was doing in Namibia. Endemic violence as a legacy of apartheid and alcoholism is rampant in many places. I brought in a lot of speakers on sexual crimes. I did a lot on that, tried to create programs for local police and communities and social workers that deal with issues like violence against women and children. It was a continuation of what I did in Namibia, and it was similar to Namibia; they had the same legacy of apartheid and exclusion and alcoholism and marginalization of Black men.

Q: How about travel from there? You did some camping. Did it give you similar opportunities?

MAZEL: I did some TDYs. While I was there I did at least four major events. I did Secretary Powell's press event for his visit to South Africa for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, WSSD. I worked on President Bush's visit to Pretoria. I did a TDY to Livingstone, Zambia, to support Tommy Thompson's visit there for World AIDS Day. I supported Embassy Harare while they were having elections there, so I went to provide public diplomacy support. Then I traveled to Kampala, Uganda, to support Secretary Albright's visit.

Q: Actually, that's quite a bit of travel around Africa.

MAZEL: I would volunteer for everything. I get charged up by big events; I like organizing big events and once you have that expertise, people call on you.

Q: That's fantastic because the other thing it also does is give you a feel for where you might want to go next.

MAZEL: I always like to visit other posts to see places and go "Ooh, I'd like to serve here."

Q: So where did you serve next?

MAZEL: Next I went as deputy chief of mission (DCM) to Monrovia, Liberia from 2005 to 2007.

Q: I have to admit – Liberia had had so much civil war, I lost track of the years.

MAZEL: I got there in the transition just before the national elections, after the long period of civil strife lasting more than 13 years. I got off the plane and the ambassador said, "We're going to go have lunch with one of the presidential candidates." There were 22 presidential candidates. We vowed as an embassy to have lunch with all of them to show that we were balanced and that we did not favor one candidate over another. I did a reporting cable on every single lunch we had with a presidential candidate. I was also very active in Liberia again on public diplomacy outreach, particularly with young audiences to tell them that there are 22 candidates and remind them that your candidate may not win. I emphasized that this was a test of democracy in Liberia and voters have to be prepared to accept the results if your candidate does not win. I delivered that message on UNMIL Radio (United Nations Mission in Liberia), the only functioning national radio station that reached all of territorial Liberia. I was very active in trying to ensure a successful election. That was the major thrust for the first months I was there.

Q: You were there for the election of the first woman president –

MAZEL: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. I observed the elections in both Monrovia and in Harper, which is a remote area. Very active in ensuring that the democratic processes worked. One of my major achievements was when an opposition candidate, George Weah, threatened to not accept the results, so the ambassador and I went out to his compound. The ambassador met with Weah; I met with his staff and senior advisers. I sat there eating chicken feet and fufu, convincing them that they lost the election and the United States would not support them if they decided to challenge the results. I explained to them why they lost the election.

Q: Which is?

MAZEL: They won the first round so they thought they had it in the bag, and they didn't really understand that you have to continue to campaign hard for the runoffs, because there are people who voted for other candidates who subsequently voted for Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. She used several arguments particularly about the importance of education, which she stressed because George Weah was uneducated; he did not have a degree. She stressed her education and it was a winning message. All mothers and fathers in Liberia, even if they're not educated, want education for their children. Weah didn't run a very good campaign in the second round. They didn't want to accept it, but we made it very clear that the United States would not support him if he challenged the results. In fact, we'd look very negatively upon that. We suggested to him that maybe he would want to spend the subsequent years getting a good education, working in the country, and then he would have a good political future. But if he challenged the results, he would not have a good future.

Q: And he bought it?

MAZEL: He did, actually. I think we were able to avert a major challenge and more civil strife in the country. It was real expeditionary diplomacy and that's what I liked.

Q: Talk a little bit about what Liberia looked like at this point after its long civil strife and all of the problems that arose.

MAZEL: When I got there and drove in from the airport (I arrived at night), there were no lights because there was no electricity in the country. There was no electricity, no water, no trash collection. Every street had huge potholes and every building was full of bullet-holes. That's what Monrovia looked like when I arrived.

Q: The security situation was sufficiently calm for the State Department to feel confident we could maintain an embassy?

MAZEL: There were 18,000 UN peacekeepers there under UNMIL. They were the ones protecting us.

Q: How were they deployed?

MAZEL: They were deployed all over the country. Bangladeshis, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Ethiopians in various towns around the country. I made a special effort to cultivate the UN peacekeepers. I organized volleyball tournaments at the embassy and invited them to come and use the embassy pool. I thought that if anything bad happened we would need their support and I wanted them to understand that they had a personal relationship with someone at the U.S. embassy.

Q: Fantastic. What did the embassy do in the situation like this where everything is needed?

MAZEL: The problem was, the place was such a mess and it was so corrupt. We had a very active USAID program with the Office of Transition Initiatives. We had security sector reform; we were demobilizing and creating a new military there. We were supporting democratization and election observers that came in for the elections. President Jimmy Carter came. There were so many things going on and we were very much involved. That's what American diplomacy does. A lot of people in the United States don't understand what diplomats do. The fact we did not have a return to violence – we were instrumental in that. You hear about places when civil strife occurs. But when you prevent civil strife, you don't hear about it.

Q: We were also as I understand active in trying to rebuild the economy, trying to create an environment for economic growth. Could you talk a little bit about that?

MAZEL: The biggest investment in the country at the time was the Firestone rubber plantation. That continued throughout the war. Then we were trying to look at new types, particularly agriculture-based opportunities for the country. Fishing because they have very rich fishing grounds, but their fishing stocks were being poached by others so we were trying to build up their maritime patrol capacity. We had to work on everything. While we were there, the Ambassador led the effort to re-established a Peace Corps presence. I did some initial work on that, but it was really Ambassador Donald Booth, who was excellent.

Q: There was enough confidence that we could have Peace Corps volunteers outside of the city?

MAZEL: Yeah, we felt confident and it worked. We were able to get the Peace Corps re-established. I just saw the initial contact with the Peace Corps back in Washington, urged them to re-establish a presence. And the ambassador was successful in getting an American type of school reopened. When I got there, there were only adult dependents who could come but they also had to work. My wife came; she got off the plane and we created a nepotism cut-out in the consular section so the ambassador supervised her (I had nothing to do with consular affairs). My wife worked as a consular associate. I was happy not to supervise consular because every meeting you have somebody has a visa request for you and I didn't want to do that. I could tell people, "I'm happy to talk to you but I can't talk about consular work because my wife's working in that section" which eliminated probably 70% of my meetings.

It was very fulfilling and we accomplished a lot.

Q: Was there any activity with the Liberian diaspora in the U.S.?

MAZEL: Of course. There's a big Liberian diaspora based around Washington, DC; Staten Island, New York; Rhode Island, and other communities around the States. Of course, we had contact with them because they had major interests and influence. There were also people from the diaspora who were coming back to work in government. It turns out the Minister of Finance, Antoinette Sayeh, was a colleague of mine at the Fletcher School. It was very good in that sense. It was very challenging but we had a good embassy team. Worked very collaboratively with our defense attaché and USAID and the Office of Transition Initiatives; great people in all of those agencies.

Q: You were there as DCM from 2005 to 2007. For a moment, how would you say Liberia has done over the last 10 years? Has it managed to come back?

MAZEL: I think it's come back some. There are still great challenges. They're doing well in terms of economic growth and development. But then you had the Ebola outbreak – that was a major setback for the country economically. They've had another round of very successful democratic elections. They're doing OK. They still have issues of corruption. I think the leadership is very good under Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Civil society has many challenges, and Ebola was a major setback for the country.

Q: Relations with its neighbors?

MAZEL: They're good. And their relations with the U.S. are excellent. We've had very good ambassadors there. We've kept up the progress there.

Q: Now as DCM, you're looking at higher level jobs, more responsibility. What are you thinking about?

MAZEL: I got a position as consul-general in Juba, but the problem was my wife developed breast cancer. We got back to the States and she went through treatment, and I could not leave while she was going through treatment. It was a very difficult period for her and me, so I had to break the assignment. I'd never broken or curtailed from an assignment; I've always accepted any position offered to me. I always stay on my assignments through my entire tour if not longer, but I had to break this one.

Q: This is in 2007?

MAZEL: Yes. I was offered an alternative position as director of AF/RSA (Bureau of African Affairs/Office of Regional Security Affairs) at the State Department. It turned out to be a very rewarding assignment. I worked a lot on the Somali piracy issue. I oversaw our peacekeeper training security sector reform programs in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan. Did a lot of public speaking on China in Africa; I spoke

all over the U.S. on China in Africa because again I proactively offered to do public diplomacy.

Q: What was the thrust of your remarks on China?

MAZEL: I talked about how successful China was in penetrating markets and securing resources, but also in gaining influence in Africa. As I often mentioned to audiences, people, China doesn't do a human rights or religious freedom report on countries. China is seen as the benefactor without any of the negative edges. The United States does a lot in Africa but we also are very quick to curtail or withdraw programs if countries are not doing things we want them to do on human trafficking, democratization, economic and political governance and the like. These are all good things, but China's not seen in that way. China will give a lot of money and training. They do major projects; they build stadiums, foreign ministries, and other government buildings. They're seen in a very positive light. To our detriment, China has gained a lot of influence in Africa. They've been very successful not only in securing resources; oil in particular but also logging concessions, mineral concessions. Exporting lots of labor and Chinese goods to Africa. I don't want to say they've cleaned our clock, but they've been very successful there.

Q: Have Chinese actually been settling in Africa?

MAZEL: They love it there because it's wide open. If you live in China, you live in a little apartment somewhere. You barely have enough room to turn around. In Africa, you can have a big house with a lot of land and a garden. The Chinese love it in Africa. They really feel liberated. There are a number of books that have been written subsequently, but when I started talking about this there was very little written about it.

Q: Local populations are OK with that?

MAZEL: Yes and no. There have been a lot of reactions in places like Angola, Zambia, and other places. Particularly Chinese penetration of retail commercial markets; Africans don't like Chinese selling them their own food.

Q: Who was the assistant secretary for Africa while you were there for AF/RSA?

MAZEL: Jendayi Frazer, and then Johnnie Carson.

Q: I imagine you worked closely with the assistant secretary.

MAZEL: Yes, I did. They were very good people. Different styles, but everybody has different styles, and I got along with all of them. In AF/RSA until 2007, I went to a lot of conferences at DOD (Department of Defense), I spoke at security cooperation meetings in Germany every year, I traveled to Djibouti, traveled a lot speaking at conferences – went to conferences in Bamako, Mali; Portugal.

Q: In general, the approach with these conferences is, are we trying to recruit other countries to assist in various projects? Or what were you looking for?

MAZEL: We were looking to engage with countries to get them to support our security positions on terrorism, countering violent extremism, the full range of our priorities in Africa. I was working very closely with AFRICOM (United States Africa Command) as it was being stood up. This was before we had the big facility in Djibouti, before they stood up CJTF-HOA (Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa). I was really engaging a lot with AFRICOM, trying to provide guidance. AFRICOM was very good but didn't have a lot of political expertise in Africa.

Q: Also, your work must have involved South Sudan, Somalia, all of the hot points.

MAZEL: Towards the end of my tour, I even went to South Sudan to be an election observer for the national elections. I went to Western Equatoria State in South Sudan to observe. I was very active, very hands-on. AF/RSA was a big office with a lot of programs. I was overseeing democracy and human rights fund activities. We had our office dealing with the UN and with the Africa Union. It was a very disparate office. Very good, determined people, both Foreign and Civil Service.

Q: How large an office was it?

MAZEL: Probably with the contract personnel, about 40 people.

Q: Good-sized office to you to be manager, especially with so many different things going on.

MAZEL: I had good deputies, and they handled their portfolios very well. But there was a lot to oversee.

Q: How long were you there?

MAZEL: I was there from 2007 to 2010, two-and-a-half years.

Q: You must have acquired a great deal of expertise in a broad range of issues.

MAZEL: On African security issues I did, yes.

Q: Did your wife recover?

MAZEL: She did and she worked in Consular Affairs in CA/VO (Bureau of Consular Affairs/Visa Office), in public inquiries. Even while she was having chemotherapy and radiation, she was working. Remember, she's a triathlete so she was in good condition and generally in good health except for the cancer.

Q: As 2010 rolls around, by now you must be fairly high up. OC (Counselor)?

MAZEL: Yep.

Q: So, you're looking for DCM or chief of mission slots?

MAZEL: EAP (Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs) offered me a DCM slot in Singapore. Having been to Singapore, I thought that would be a great opportunity, so I was selected as deputy chief of mission for Singapore.

Q: Very different issues there?

MAZEL: Very different. But I'd served in Malaysia so I was aware of the general political and economic issues in the region. I had a wonderful tour, from 2010 to 2013. Wonderful embassy. We were inspected; the ambassador who was the lead inspector said it was "the happiest embassy she had ever inspected with the most collegial interagency team."

Q: Holy cow!

MAZEL: We had 19 U.S. government agencies. It was a very successful mission. The ambassador, David Adelman, was excellent. We had tons of visitors. I did at least two briefings a week for visiting senior U.S. officials every week for three years. Lots of people coming through. We had a great political section, good leadership in the agencies. It was a wonderful mission. Everybody came through: Secretary Clinton; Defense Secretary Gates was there several times. It was a wonderful place to be posted. Close relations with the government. Very strong mil-to-mil relationship. Very large American business community. It was very fulfilling.

Q: What issues did we have with Singapore?

MAZEL: The major issue was supporting the president's National Export Initiative, to grow U.S. exports. I personally would go to every trade show and walk around and meet with the American companies who were exhibiting. I was very active in engaging with the American Chamber of Commerce. I was very involved in meeting with government officials.

We had so many high-level people coming and so many briefings. I briefed the secretary of the Treasury, Director of National Intelligence Clapper and others. I was constantly briefing people. I did a lot of public speaking; any group that came to the embassy and wanted a briefing, I would go and brief and get people from other sections to participate. I never saw myself as above anything. I would work hard, carve out time for people. I was out probably five nights a week at events – national days. When you have more than 90 embassies, you have a lot of national days; almost two a week. I was out a lot.

Q: How'd your wife do?

MAZEL: She couldn't work because of nepotism issues. But we did so much representational stuff at the house… She recovered from her breast cancer and was triathlon champion of Singapore for her age group. Also, a Duathlon champion, she did a lot of events. And she was also doing some math tutoring. We stayed very busy.

Q: What about Singapore relations in either ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) or in the region?

MAZEL: Singapore had good relations with all of its neighbors. We were trying to leverage Singapore to bring about change in Burma. That was a very successful period for us; if you remember, the secretary traveled to Burma and President Obama then traveled to Burma twice in total. We had a very successful effort in bringing Burma back from being a very negative place. Aung San Suu Kyi was released, they had elections. I volunteered to support Secretary Clinton during her visit to Cambodia; they needed someone who had some public diplomacy skills, so I did that.

That reminds me, when I was in AF/RSA I also went to support Secretary Clinton's visit to Goma in eastern Congo. She did a day working with victims of gender-based violence and rape.

Singapore was a very fulfilling tour. Very busy because we had so many VIPs, ship visits, carrier visits, big events, the air show, the maritime show – all of these had a big U.S. presence and I was very much engaged in all of these.

Q: Do we have significant exchange programs with Singapore as well?

MAZEL: Yes. A lot of the Singapore military is based in the U.S. Their air force and a lot of their major equipment is here in the U.S. Singapore is too small to train, so they train in the U.S. at three locations.

Q: It's not that big a country; what size is their military?

MAZEL: They have a very good military. Very well-educated people and well paid. They have a very strong air force and a good naval capacity. It is mostly a volunteer force, but there is mandatory national service in Singapore. So all young Singaporean males serve for a certain period.

Q: From here as DCM in Singapore, you'd be looking at ambassadorships.

MAZEL: I was supposed to get a chief of mission position, but it fell through. I'm not quite sure why it fell through; I think somebody outmaneuvered me at some point. I was not a Washington insider, I didn't play that game. I was supposed to be a chief of mission and somebody else stepped in. I came back to Washington; I did a Y-tour (a temporary tour) first in EAP and they sent me to Palau to be chief of mission there for a short period of time. Came back and worked on the Typhoon Haiyan task force and then worked on a public-private partnership program for Secretary Kerry's visit to the Philippines to show

support for the reconstruction efforts post-Typhoon Haiyan. I was also doing work on how the bureau could support Myanmar's chairmanship of ASEAN. Then I was asked to come over to AF and work on the first ever U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit. So I did that. I organized the AF Chiefs of Mission conference which I had done twice before when I was in AF/RSA. I was also on the founding team of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit which was a major initiative by President Obama.

Q: That's not an easy thing to do.

MAZEL: I was the first hire in the office – I was joined by Ambassador Steve Nolan and Amy Hoffner and Ambassador Mike Battle. We were the organizing hub of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit. We did a lot of engaging with the field, met with all the African ambassadors in Washington and New York to find out what they wanted to get out of it, and laid the groundwork for a very successful first ever U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.

Q: In the summit itself you must have played a pretty visible role in the three-ring circus?

MAZEL: No I didn't. I worked on the lead-up but during that time I was named chief of mission at the chargé level for Eritrea. I had to get out to Eritrea in July and the summit was in August, so I couldn't see it through to its actual fruition.

Q: This is August 2014?

MAZEL: Correct. So '13 to '14, I was in Washington. July 5, 2014 I went to Asmara as chief of mission.

Q: Now why were we at chargé level there?

MAZEL: Because of the nature of the relations between the governments. I went through the ambassadorial seminar, had all the same courses as the ambassadors, but I was at the chargé level.

Q: Because we're making a statement about human rights?

MAZEL: About a lot of things. Relations were not good enough to be at the ambassador level at that time. So, I went out in '14. It was a very challenging assignment. It was a small mission and it seemed to have been a forgotten mission; when I got out there, nothing worked. Communications were terrible because we hadn't had a technician there in eight years to fix the satellite. We had the oldest telephone system in the Foreign Service. Offices hadn't been repainted or carpeted. Buildings were crumbling on the outside. I decided I was going to fix everything in the embassy. I had a good management officer who shared my vision on that, so we went about fixing everything. We also began the process of installing solar energy at all the residences of the mission. Every country team meeting began with "how much fuel do we have left?" Would we cross a tripwire? I

was tired of worrying every week whether we could maintain the mission. We started installing solar energy to cut down on our diesel fuel consumption and save money.

Q: So the solar panels would take care of certain appliances or just the overall electricity in the house?

MAZEL: Everything. My house needed more panels because I had a bigger house. By the time I left I think we were up to eight residences. Six were finished and two more were in the works. In my house alone we were saving almost $3000 a month in fuel costs.

Q: The panels provided enough electricity for everything in the house?

MAZEL: Everything. Not only were we saving the government money but we were supporting the State Department's greening initiative and the president's climate change using renewable energy. We figured that the solar system that was installed in my residence, we would amortize it within a year and a half to two years.

Q: Also water filtration?

MAZEL: We used distillers. Knock on wood, people were pretty healthy at post. Even though we didn't have an American medical officer, we had a local nurse and physician and people were generally healthy. We were saving a lot of money by going solar. We refurbished every single office in the embassy in two years – carpet, paint, fixed ceilings, refreshed every work space.

Q: There was no thought of moving the embassy to a better building? Was it always restore?

MAZEL: No. We want to have a new embassy compound. The problem was relations were not good enough and the government would not give us the land to build an embassy. There are two philosophies. You could say, "Well, we're going to move someday so why put money in?" Or my philosophy is, "We're the United States embassy, we should not let it run down just because some day we may have a NEC" (new embassy compound). Most of what we did we did with internal equipment. We had one building on the compound that was vacant, built by another agency but never opened. It had carpet tiles, ceiling tiles, equipment, desks. So rather than sell off everything, we just used it.

Q: Excellent. You probably spent a fair amount of time calling Washington, calling OBO (Bureau of Overseas Building Operations) and all of that.

MAZEL: No, I didn't. We just did it. We had visits by the OBO officer. We also had the first visit by a satellite technician in eight years who fixed our communications. We had the first visit by radio and telephone techs who replaced our phone system. In decades, we had the first visit by people who could fix our security cameras. When I got there, I said "Why don't we have a satellite technician?" They said, "They won't give us a visa." I said let's try. And we were able to secure the visas so we started running like a normal

embassy. Before I got there, we couldn't get visas, regional personnel did not visit because they couldn't get visas. Well, when I was there, we got visas for our regional consular officer, regional personnel officer, regional OBO person, facilities manager, regional medical officer, and regional psychiatrist. Everybody came through and we were operating as a normal embassy. The government was letting us have our pouches, letting us get our shipments and vehicles.

Q: How large was the post?

MAZEL: We only had 10 Americans and about 50 local employees.

Q: What were the issues that were quite difficult that we…

MAZEL: The issue was the government. We had very bad relations because the Eritrean government believes that the United States as the guarantor of the peace agreement with Ethiopia should have insisted that Ethiopia leave the contested areas of Badme. The government believes we were siding with Ethiopia. That coupled with the poor human rights record and poor economic policies lead to a degradation of relations between the U.S. and Eritrea. I felt that we should have worked more with Eritrea on issues that were of interest to us like counterterrorism and countering violent extremism, oceans, refugees, while still pressing on human rights concerns. Being cognizant that there were important issues where we had shared values, I felt that we lost an opportunity to do that. Back in Washington at certain levels of government there were very hard positions about engagement with Eritrea. I felt we should have engaged more on issues that were of interest to us.

Q: Could you get out?

MAZEL: It was very hard. I needed permission to travel 25 kilometers outside the capital and I never knew until the day before I was leaving if I was going to get the paperwork to travel. It was very hard to make plans. I went to Keren three times, I went to visit the Bisha mine, and I went to Massawa three or four times. That was basically it. I didn't do a lot of traveling. I was invited to weddings in a place called Dekemhare and so I went there. I didn't do a lot of travel.

I spent a lot of time in Asmara. We created an embassy sports day and had members of the international community and Eritreans come to the embassy on Saturdays to play tennis. We had yoga at the embassy. I organized a hiking group in Eritrea along with my DCM; it was very active. We brought the international community together with the U.S. embassy being a focal point.

Q: Fantastic. Relations never really did get any better?

MAZEL: They couldn't get better because there are certain people in the U.S. government at certain levels who really are not interested, and those people occupy very senior positions. It was not possible to move that forward. I never wanted to be seen as

bugging the NSC (National Security Council) and the White House for what was ultimately a lost cause in terms of trying to move things forward. I always wanted to be balanced in our reporting. Made my recommendations; if they were accepted, fine. If not, that's why we have senior people in government that take the decision; I recognize that.

Q: Who were the major players in Eritrea?

MAZEL: The Chinese on the economic side. Then the European Union had a good assistance program. We had no bilateral assistance at all in Eritrea while I was there. And the United Nations.

Q: Your wife was there with you?

MAZEL: No, she was back in Washington. Her mother's quite elderly and she had to put her mother in an assisted living facility, and my wife had to be nearby. She would not have been able to work in Eritrea and frankly there was not a lot for her to do other than organize representational events. Even so, if it wasn't for her mother, she would have come out.

Q: You were there from July '14 to July '16.

MAZEL: I did two years plus. I came back. Now I've gotten too old for this business. I've aged out, so it's time to retire.

Q: Now that you've had all of this experience, are you looking towards a post-State Department life?

MAZEL: Yeah. I'd like to continue to contribute, to serve the department I think in a WAE (while actually employed) position. That, or in a personal services contractor position. I enjoyed my career. I enjoyed working for the State Department. I like the people in this profession. I enjoy my colleagues; they're smart and interesting and worldly. I like being involved and I think the State Department is a terrific institution. I would like to continue to be engaged in some way.

Q: For somebody who is thinking about Foreign Service or international service in some way as a career these days, how would you advise them?

MAZEL: First of all, I think it's a wonderful career. You don't make as much money as you would make in the private sector but you have a very nice life. If you led a successful career, you have a nice pension in our business. You get to see interesting places around the world, meet interesting people, learn languages, experience cultures. I think it's a wonderful career. There are many people in the Foreign Service because of me, because I spoke to their groups in Cape Town, South Africa, Singapore, or other places. I've gotten at least four emails in my career from people who said, "you spoke to my group and because of your presentation, I decided to join the Foreign Service." At least four that I

know of – no five, because there was one earlier, before I did public speaking. He was the boyfriend of someone I met in Crossroads Africa.

Q: In terms of mentoring in the Foreign Service, were you mentored? How do you recommend someone go about looking for a mentor these days?

MAZEL: I've done mentoring; I still have people who contact me about bidding and ask me to do 360 recommendations for them. Mentoring is important. It's important to spend time with entry-level officers. For instance, when I was in Singapore, once a week I would go out with the entry-level officers for lunch and talk with them. Talk about their careers and issues, I thought it was a good way to elicit issues they had with supervisors. I did that a lot, every week for three years.

Q: At this point, you are retired…

MAZEL: I'm retiring tomorrow.

Q: Expecting – do you already have a position to go back out to temporarily?

MAZEL: No, not yet. I've spoken to a few people and put feelers out, and we'll see what transpires.

Thank you for this opportunity.

End of interview