

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

DAVID MCAULEY

*Interviewed by: Robin Matthewman
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INTERVIEW

Q: Good afternoon. It's March 11, 2021, and we are starting our first interview with David McAuley. David, welcome.

MCAULEY: Thank you.

Q: You go by Dave, David?

MCAULEY: Usually David.

Q: Okay. So let's start off with where and when you were born.

MCAULEY: I was born in 1960 in a suburb of New York City, on Long Island.

Q: Where was that? I grew up in Merrick, Long Island.

MCAULEY: Actually, my sister lives in Merrick now. I grew up and I graduated from Syosset High School in Syosset, New York. I lived there until age eighteen.

Q: So tell me a little bit about your family, your family background, how long they've been in the United States, and your parents?

MCAULEY: I have a normal middle class background. My grandparents were immigrants. My father's parents came from Ireland and my mother's parents came from Poland. My parents met in New York City in the late 1940s. As people were doing back then, they moved out to the suburbs. I have one older sister who is five years older than me. As I've told you, she still lives pretty close to where I grew up. The school I went to was actually a very good public high school, one of those public high schools that

regularly receives awards for best public high schools in the U.S. So I feel like I had a better education than average, through no effort of my own.

Q: What did your parents do?

MCAULEY: My father was an electrical engineer who worked at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA] contractor. He actually worked on the vehicle that landed on the moon for the first time. One of my earliest memories was watching the moon landing on black and white television when I was nine years old. It was the middle of summer and there was no school. It was a hot, hot day. I watched a black and white TV at home with all the lights out to keep things cool, and I watched it with my mother. My father was at work, as he later told me, it was more of a party day at work. He was very proud of that achievement, as he should have been.

Q: That is exciting. Did the whole space program play an important part in your childhood? Were you home?

MCAULEY: After that, he moved on to a defense contractor that did submarines named Sperry Rand, which was located in Lake Success, New York. That's where he worked until he retired. He stayed for twenty plus years. My mother only had a high school education, but about the time that I was entering junior high school, twelve years old, everybody agreed that she could go back to work and so she got various jobs. She worked at temp agencies. Eventually she snagged a job as a receptionist and bookkeeper for Xerox. At the time, it was an enormous company. She worked in a place where companies, just before the computer revolution, sent things out to be photocopied in quantity. She worked there and actually, that was one of my first jobs as well, to work the night shift at the same place, which I got through my mother's influence.

Q: As a teenager or after school?

MCAULEY: As a teenager.

Q: Did you have siblings?

MCAULEY: I have one older sister.

Q: Alright, and your dad started working in upstate New York, but he would come home to stay?

MCAULEY: No, I'm sorry. I don't know if I gave the impression that he was working in upstate New York. I said he was working in Lake Success on Long Island.

I had a summer job working at his plant, for the summer between my freshman and sophomore years at university. So, we lived on Long Island, you lived on Long Island and we're roughly contemporary. New York City was quite different then than it is now. My mother was particularly terrified of New York City at that time. She did not want me to go there even during the daytime. Of course, that made me want to go even more.

Q: Well, we had these nice train connections. My family reacted a little differently; my parents enjoyed going into the city to see the Broadway musicals. But I do remember the first time I went on the train with my friend to New York City, my father grilled me about how I had made sure I protected myself.

MCAULEY: Right, my father's brother was actually a high-level official in the police department of New York City for a while. We would go in to see him at his office, which was above a police station. My father and I might go into New York City once or twice a year, but my mother wasn't interested in going at all. At that time, New York was quite different than it is today, of course. I somewhat understand her reluctance, but still, I felt like I missed out.

Q: Did you have any special interests growing up, sports or music or reading?

MCAULEY: I've always been a tremendously bookish kid. I guess it's not really, really, a surprise that I ended up being an English teacher.

I loved baseball. My first fantasy was to be a baseball player, but I was not even good enough to make the higher levels of my local leagues. Then, my father was the youngest of five brothers, and his other brothers were in the police department or connected with the police department, so I wanted to be a policeman for a while. But that was before I really understood the reality of being a policeman.

My mother's family was from New Jersey. Three or four times a year, we would take a long trip across the Cross Bronx Expressway into New Jersey. My grandfather and my father were not on the best of terms. I later learned that my father and my mother more or less eloped. This was something I only learned when I was twenty years old. My father had been married for a year before and had his first marriage annulled. I only learned that when I was twenty years old and that was pretty shocking for me. This was so long ago that a good Catholic, like my Polish grandfather, didn't want to have a son-in-law who

had had an annulment, even though an annulment was supposed to make it okay in the eyes of the church.

Q: I suppose most families were Catholic?

MCAULEY: Yes, that's right. But, my father was an engineer, so he didn't really have much truck with religion. Getting up early on Sunday and going into church with an enormous parking lot and fighting to get a parking space, and then going in and hearing how you should be charitable to each other, and then swearing at people in the parking lot. (laughs) By the time I got my first communion, I was the youngest child, and that was pretty much it for church until I met my wife, my future wife.

Q: Did you have any international experiences at all?

MCAULEY: Absolutely none. Not only did my mother not want to go into New York City, she was afraid of going on airplanes. I really had a strong feeling like I wanted to see the world. I remember when I was twelve years old, my father asked me what I wanted for my birthday and I said: "I wanted to take an airplane flight." So we took an airplane flight from New York to Washington, D.C., from LaGuardia Airport to National. This was my first time on a plane.

Q: Just the two of you or with your sister?

MCAULEY: Oh, just the two of us. This was 1972, there were shuttles, where you could get off at the curb and walk directly onto the plane. There was no metal detecting, no security, or anything. You walk right up to the gate. If you were actually there for the shuttle, you don't even have to have a ticket in advance, you just bought it right there. So, that was the first time I came to D.C. I met my congressman (who was later sent to prison for corruption). I saw the Smithsonian, the Capitol, and all that stuff for the first time.

Q: That's wonderful. That's really lovely, your dad did that for you. I think there's something about Long Island, it's just so quiet that sometimes you just are dying to get out and see the rest of the world, right?

MCAULEY: I mean, you really have New York City as sort of a gigantic impediment to seeing any place else. So, that's why I chose to go away and I didn't really return for any significant amount of time after I started University.

Q: How did you make the university decision?

MCAULEY: Oh, well, it was funny. I went to Boston University, where I met my wife. It was my third choice school, my first choice was Georgetown. I was sort of on the border of getting admitted. I remember I had an interview with a man near my home. Years later, I understood America a little better, I realized that he was trying to see if I was a good Catholic, suitable for the school. I wasn't. I didn't get into Georgetown. I also applied to McGill University in Montreal, Canada. I got in, but I couldn't get housing, so I ended up going to Boston University, actually sight unseen.

Q: Did you know what you wanted to study? Did that guide your decision? As I find in our generation, maybe we weren't quite as intentional about careers as later.

MCAULEY: Yes, that's exactly right. What I decided was not the dumbest decision I've ever made. I decided that I wanted to be far enough away from my parents that I got some independence, but not so far that I had to sort of leave their orbit completely. So, I felt that again Washington, Montreal, Boston were far enough from New York City. You were away from home and you didn't come home for the weekend so your mother would do your laundry, right? But I felt like I wasn't quite ready to go to school in California, for example. I wanted to be able to come home for Thanksgiving. So, location was important and I wanted to go to school in a city.

It turns out Boston was wonderful not only because I met my wife there, but also I did things. Another thing that I did that turned out to be a better decision than a lot of the decisions I made. I was in Boston and I decided whenever I saw a famous person speaking, I would put aside whatever I was doing then go and see them, writers, poets, scientists.

Of course, in Boston, you had stuff like that all the time. As a result, I saw, for example, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the poet who died last week. I saw him read at Boston City Hall in 1978. I saw Noam Chomsky, I saw Buckminster Fuller, I saw Kurt Vonnegut. My desire to leave campus like this gave me good habits, like I actually finished a lot of my homework early. So if there was a chance to go see someone, I could see them. Anyway, that's how I ended up at Boston University and I met my future wife, the Foreign Service officer, actually, my first year there. We met in the dormitory where I lived. There was a guy who she went to high school with. I will tell you the big secret of our marriage is that she is three years older than I am. But it wasn't like we immediately started dating. It took a long time, which turned out to be a great thing. But that wasn't how I planned it.

Q: So, it's a liberal arts program that you started?

MCAULEY: Yeah. I majored in economics for a while, then I majored in English for a while, and I ended up in the journalism program, so that was my degree eventually.

Q: Did you like journalism studies?

MCAULEY: Yeah, I liked journalism, I've never actually worked as a journalist, except for when I've done blogging myself. It helped me a lot though, when I worked at the embassy, I had to draft things, understand writing clearly and simply, which was not a new concept to me.

Q: Right. Good preparation. Did you have any aspirations of being like a novelist or anything?

MCAULEY: Actually, I loved reading literature. I sort of had vague aspirations, but I never really acted on them. By the time I graduated, I was going out with Susan and I was pretty much a slacker. I just decided that for a year, or two, or three, and maybe more, I just wanted to have a not very challenging job and be with my girl. We lived in Boston, we were young, and we didn't really have any serious problems, although it didn't seem that way at the time. Susan was going to graduate school in German literature at the time. In my senior year at university, when we were already dating, she was studying in Tubingen, Germany. I flew to Germany to see her, which was the first time I had been out of the country. This was against my parents' wishes.

Q: They were against you taking the trip?

MCAULEY: Yes, but by then, I had found a job on the economy in Boston. Earlier, I tried to apply for financial aid from the university but my parents were too prosperous. But luckily, I was in the middle of the city, so I knew somebody who worked for a security guard firm. So, for several years, I had a blue uniform and a blue hat and no weapon, just a telephone. I worked at parking lots and I actually worked for a newspaper, but just sitting at the front desk of the newspaper I also worked in an expensive condominium. So, with that money I earned, I went against my parents' wishes and bought a cheap plane ticket to Germany. After we had been married for many years, knowing what a lovely woman my wife was, my father actually apologized and said he wished that he had given me some money. But of course, I didn't hold it against him at all.

Q: So tell me about your trip to Germany. That must have been fun.

MCAULEY: Yes. I mean, It was so exciting to be actually outside the USA. Susan met me at Frankfurt airport. As she probably told you, she studied in Tübingen, an ancient German university town, it was just fascinating. Then we traveled around Germany a little bit. We traveled to Zurich, where I made Susan go around Zurich looking for James Joyce's grave, which we actually didn't find until years later, when we visited the second time, when I had better information. We went to Munich and it was so wonderful for me. It just really did not disappoint.

Q: They're such different kinds of places, right? Because Munich is the southern beer hall kind of atmosphere. Zurich is pretty, but it's a very grown up city, right? This historical, university town was probably very, very picturesque. I think of Heidelberg, I don't know if it's what it looked like.

MCAULEY: It's smaller than Heidelberg, but in some ways, that's kind of nice. I mean, it was especially nice, because it was my first time outside the United States, it wasn't so intimidating, you know.

Q: So, you didn't speak German?

MCAULEY: No, but Susan did. So, that was the first time I was outside the United States. I loved it. I had a wonderful, wonderful time. I remember I wanted to stay so much, I actually delayed the airplane. They called my name and they closed the door as soon as I got on the plane. Yeah, they almost left without me, but they didn't leave without me. I had a wonderful time.

Q: She came back shortly thereafter?

MCAULEY: She stayed a year in Germany. I visited her over the Christmas break and then she came back in May. I remember I drove the old wreck of my car from Boston to New York. I stayed with my parents and I picked her up at Kennedy Airport. Then bringing her from Kennedy Airport to my house was the first time she met my parents. She was, of course, just recovering from the transatlantic flight. My father had two years of high school German, which made him a German translator during World War II. My father was very proud of his German. If he had any reason to do so at all, he would say in German, "Come out with your hands up! This house is surrounded!" That was the first thing he said to my future wife.

Q: Good afternoon. It's March 15 2021, and we are continuing our conversation with David McAuley. David, we had a little bit of recording problems at the end of our first

session. So I think I just want to pick up again. Susan, your then girlfriend, or fiancé had gone to Germany and you took a trip to see her. So I think we'll pick up there. Okay?

MCAULEY: Yes, I might duplicate a little bit. Yes, this was my first trip out of the U.S. I came from a family that really didn't travel very much, didn't like traveling. When we traveled, it was by car. So, I wanted to go and see her in Germany, my parents were against it, but I was working part-time while going to Boston University. I managed to scrape together enough money for a cheap ticket to Germany. I think I mentioned to you last time that later, especially my father said, oh he wished he had given me some money. But I guess because everything turned out okay, I ended up marrying this girl. So, yes, I visited her and she was a university student in Tübingen, a charming little town. We took a little trip, we went to Switzerland, we went to Zurich, and I made her look for James Joyce's grave because this was before the internet, my information wasn't as good. The first time we went there, we didn't actually find James Joyce's grave. We had to go back there years later to find James Joyce's grave.

Q: Hey, something about persistence.

MCAULEY: We had a lovely time. Then we went to Munich as well, also in the middle of winter and that was lovely. That was about three weeks and then I almost missed the flight going back because I didn't want to leave. I stayed with her until the very last minute. They were calling my name by the gate, I got in, they closed the door right behind me and that's how I got back. That was my senior year at university.

Q: What were you doing after you left school?

MCAULEY: When I finished, the economy was in a recession. I also didn't want to move out of Boston, and I guess I was a bit of a slacker. I just wanted to be with my girlfriend and not have a job that bothered me too much. I got a job as a telephone operator. I had a job which today is done by a machine, but you may remember, long ago, when people charged their credit card over a certain amount, you had to call and get a confirmation number. Answering the phone and giving me those confirmation numbers was my job. When there weren't phone calls, we also did data entry on credit cards. Again, that job does not exist today. I did that for two years while my future wife returned home and went to second year graduate school at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts.

Q: Okay, and then around that time, Susan got an offer to go to the Foreign Service.

MCAULEY: Well, actually, after Susan graduated, she got a job doing bookkeeping and office work at a place that weighed wooden massage tools for your back, which was run by, if memory serves, an acupuncturist from Hong Kong.

Q: Sounds like a handy thing to be able to bring home.

MCAULEY: She was offered a job teaching one section of undergraduate German at MIT, on Tuesday and Thursday morning, but that was not going to pay a lot. She felt like she had to get a full time job. That was when we moved in together, we actually moved from the Somerville area, Massachusetts, to Brighton, which was within city limits of Boston. We lived together. By that time, I had gotten a job at the billing department of a publishing company in downtown Boston. So, we moved into place and we thought that even though we didn't really have spectacular careers, we had enough money. We were living together in an apartment and we thought life was pretty good. That was when Susan got the call to go into the Foreign Service.

Q: I think you said that she had about three weeks to decide, is that right?

MCAULEY: Actually, less than that, it may have been two weeks, or it may have been a day or two short of that. But apparently, they were just going down the list and they still had a few spaces left. That was the story anyway.

Q: Did she come back and say she gets this news by call or by email, and she comes to tell you?

MCAULEY: When we got the news, we were living together. She had gotten the news at work that previous day, then she had gone out that evening with some friends, I hadn't gone. I woke up early as was normal to get to my job. I was having my breakfast when she opened the door. She said she had to talk to me about something. I knew it was very serious, because she never gets up early in the morning. I knew she had been taking the test. She said, "I've been offered a job in the Foreign Service with the State Department, I'd like to take it." I said "Sure, let's go," that was it. That was the end of the discussion. It never occurred to me for a second to hesitate. I never said: "Oh, what about my career? What about leaving?" I was like, let's have a big adventure! There was absolutely no hesitation on either of our parts.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful! I think I recall that she went down to Washington to start the A-100 class, the entry level class, and she left you to do all the arranging and packing. Is that right?

MCAULEY: Right. We didn't know this at the time, but we didn't have very much stuff. She went to start A-100, the introductory class. I stayed in Boston and continued to work at my job. When we started, we didn't know where we were going.

Back then, you had to be heterosexual and you had to be married in order to live in government housing and get a ticket from the government. We weren't married, so we got married. She flew up on a Friday, got married on a Saturday, and she flew back on a Sunday. My wife is an orphan and doesn't have a lot of family. So, there was actually nobody from the little bit of her family there. Just her best friend from high school and my parents, my sister, her future husband and an aunt and uncle, and that was it. We got married in the rec room of the apartment building of the justice of the peace overlooking the Charles River in Cambridge. Then we went to a seafood restaurant for dinner. We had a little party in the room and invited some more people.

Q: This is in Boston right?

MCAULEY: In Boston.

Q: And your parents came up?

MCAULEY: Yes, my parents drove up from New York.

Q: Very nice.

MCAULEY: My sister, my uncle and stuff like that.

Q: And from there, you went on to DC and you started meeting people in the State Department?

MCAULEY: Well, I flew to DC for some weekends, so you know when you're in A-100, everybody's young and every weekend there's a party somewhere. So, I met a bunch of people that were in her A-100 class that way, but I kept on working. She was clearly having a great time, that was a little bit stressful for me. She would go to the Pawn Shop every day, which was the bar in Roslyn that everybody in A-100 went to. We didn't have cell phones. I would call her home phone at 9pm, she would not be home. She had gone out drinking at the Pawn Shop. It wasn't my favorite moment in the Foreign Service, but I got over it.

We didn't know where she would be assigned, of course, but I was ready to go anywhere. When Susan found out, she called me at work and said, "I've been assigned to London,

there's a big line of people behind me waiting to use this phone." I said, "Okay fine, thank you." I hung up, turned around and everybody at work was looking at me. I said, "London." I got a round of applause.

Q: That's very exciting, right? So, you didn't even get to leave from DC together, you left from JFK in New York?

MCAULEY: Right, and five other people from Susan's A-100 class were in there, and they all traveled as a group. Four of the five of this group were traveling on the same flight. The group of like six people who are all in the same A-100 class formed a little social group.

Q: So London was a great experience?

MCAULEY: London was a wonderful experience.

Q: What's the year again?

MCAULEY: It was 1985 to January of 1987. Not much happened in the way of British politics that was really tremendously memorable. Mrs. Thatcher was sort of just beginning to decline from the height of her power, I can say with the benefit of hindsight. I remember the biggest scandal of the entire year and a half was that the only remaining helicopter company in England went out of business. Michael Heseltine, who was trying to sort of position himself as the successor of Thatcher, made a big fuss about it. That was the most controversial internal thing for England, that was it.

Q: Did you get to work?

MCAULEY: I did eventually.

The first couple of months, I didn't work. Just to give structure to my day, I took classes in German at the Goethe Institute. I had daily classes and I met some people. Then, in the spring of 1996, I started at the embassy in the visa section. As you probably know, back then, every British person had to have a visa. The non-immigrant visa section was like a giant white-collar factory. I remember I did the mathematics myself and I figured out that on an average working day, we stamped 1700 visas in passports. In the really quiet time around Christmas, it was only two or three hundred. During the peak traveling times, it would be more than 3,000. It was really eye opening. The whole thing was run by the local employees. There was supposed to be American control over it, but what would happen is that the employees would screen a box of passports. Then two or three

passports that they marked as needing review would go after a red card in the back of the tray. Officers were supposed to review the ones in the back and then pick ones out from the front for random review. There was pressure on everybody to get everything done as quickly as possible.

Q: We weren't doing fingerprinting yet then, right? So what was your job?

MCAULEY: Well, I had a bunch of different jobs. Sometimes I worked on correspondence. Sometimes I'd just open up— we'd get enormous bags of passports in the mail. Then you just open them up, throw out the outer envelope, put the passport application inside the passport and wrap it up with a rubber band. You would have the return envelope and the form all situated in a way that the officer can just grab it and look at it. After a little while, they told us what to look for in visa applications, and then we were, as they called it, pre-approving. We would stamp the application forms as approved. The officer was supposed to be reviewing them, but in most cases, the officer didn't review them.

Q: So, you'd worked in a couple of big factory type of places in Boston. How did this compare, was the US Department of State woefully behind in modern management techniques?

MCAULEY: No, it was about the same. I didn't think the private businesses that I worked for were significantly better managed.

I think the biggest international thing that happened while we were there was that planes based in the UK bombed Libya. That meant, there were protesters in front of the embassy. I would leave the embassy, I was dressed in one of my two suits and six neckties. Protestors would yell at me, “You fascist! fascist!”

Q: Oh, no.

MCAULEY: I wanted to say: “What, I'm not a fascist! I'm just the guy who stamps the visas.” That was sort of a thing that told me, oh, this is real, it is not a game.

The embassy was in Grosvenor Square. Mayfair was in a beautiful, beautiful section of the middle of London. Since that time, the Embassy has moved.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that. Then you have some outside friends too, right?

MCAULEY: I did take some classes and things like that, but the group of friends were the people from A-100, the half dozen of us or so and their spouses, those were the people we went out with.

I don't know what other people felt like, but all of us were very busy doing tourist things on the weekend. I felt like somebody was going to come along in a few months and say, hey wait, you weren't supposed to get all this good fortune, give it back. So we had to spend the money as fast as possible. Three day weekends we would travel in England, or we might go to Amsterdam or something like that. We would see movies and go to the theater all the time. The money that we were getting paid was smaller compared to the money later, but it seemed like all the money in the world at the time. We were 25 and really weren't thinking about saving for retirement yet.

It was nice. The work was actually – in retrospect – great, because it was foreign, but not really foreign. I was able to ease into the diplomatic life a little bit. Work seemed like an office in America in a lot of ways. Occasionally, jarring things would happen. Like, there would be a bomb scare, concerning a car parked behind the embassy. And there was an enormous glass window facing the alley behind the embassy. When there was a bomb at the side, they just told people, pick up your boxes of passports and move to the other side of the room. But don't stop working.

Q: You didn't feel that safe.

MCAULEY: I didn't really feel that that was sufficiently interested in my well-being. But there was a lot of work to do, it's true.

Q: And you say you'd been this first story you took to the Foreign Service life? It was?

MCAULEY: Yeah, it seemed really crazy that I should be getting this good stuff from the government.

It was our first Thanksgiving overseas I remembered very fondly. My wife and I have always had a long running joke in our marriage. She's afraid that if food stays outside the refrigerator one extra moment, it will collect bacteria and we will die. The first Thanksgiving, we had people from A-100 over. We drank a lot of wine and had turkey. When we were all finished, my wife took the big round pot that the turkey had been sitting in, and she put it on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator above the crisper, which was glass. And the next day, I got up early, I went down and the heat had made that completely circular crack, and the whole thing had plunged into the crisper.

Q: Oh, no.

MCAULEY: This was something that we only figured out later, that is, people do all sorts of bonehead things in their Embassy housing and then call the General Services Officer (GSO) to clean up the mess. However, we were so green, we were ashamed and were too embarrassed to call the embassy. Later, we knew that people did all sorts of crazy things and called the embassy to fix things without any shame at all.

My wife had me call somebody I found in the paper telephone book. We got a rectangular piece of glass put in there and the embassy never did anything. But that's how green we were. We were ashamed to call the embassy GSO with our problems.

Q: Did you ever think about taking the Foreign Service exam yourself?

MCAULEY: I actually took the Foreign Service exam several times, passed it two or three times. But once I got to the oral interview I didn't do well. When I get nervous, I make wise-cracking jokes and it doesn't go over so well. I felt bad at the time and I wished that I could have been in the Foreign Service too. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I realized that things worked out very well the way it happened. I think it was all for the best.

Q: So then what was the next stop after London?

MCAULEY: Right! I did want to confirm something that she had told you, which was one of my proudest moments in London was falsifying the data. I'm sorry, I probably shouldn't put it that way. Massaging the data, so England could get the visa waiver.

Q: Oh, so tell me about that. I don't think we've gone into great detail on this. Sounds like you are a hero?

MCAULEY: Back then we didn't have computers, a lot of that stuff had to be done by hand, with the help of some computer printouts and primitive computers.

Q: Well, what's the criteria, the quantitative criteria, you needed to get a visa waiver program?

MCAULEY: Below 2% refusal rates. If memory serves, when I ran the numbers, it was 3.5%. A lot of the people who were refused visas were nannies. People who are unemployed were refused. And so on. But the word had come down from the ambassador, who was if I remember correctly, was a retired candy manufacturer from

Kansas City. He wanted England to get the visa waiver. So we ran it and it didn't work. So the boss said, "Seven hundred people who were refused 214 (b) should have been refused 221 (g). But the officers were too inexperienced to know that. So move 700 refusals from this column for this column. Because if they are refused under 221 (g), then they don't count."

Q: And it might be the case, because they come back and bring the right documents, they get either refused again or they get accepted. Section 221 (g) is for people that haven't brought enough information.

MCAULEY: By that time, I knew that too, but I feel that the boss did not do any research to justify that number. He just pulled that number out of the air because he wished to please the Ambassador.

Q: Okay.

MCAULEY: The second time, we were still a little bit above the 2% target. The boss declared that another 150 or 200 applicants had been refused erroneously like this. So that's how we got underneath.

Q: Okay, but nobody got in trouble. Everything went fine.

MCAULEY: Oh all fine.

Q: Then you were a hero.

MCAULEY: I don't know about that. But the most rewarding moment was when I met Sean Connery, who came in for his visa.

Q: Ah, what is he like?

MCAULEY: Oh, he was of course charming. He was going to use the visa to film *The Untouchables*.

Q: He needed a special visa.

MCAULEY: Yes, of course. He was meeting the ambassador. So he came around and he applied.

*Q: I would have liked to have been there. In *The Untouchables* he was wonderful.*

MCAULEY: Right.

Q: Anything else that was really exciting there?

MCAULEY: No. The Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders also came to the consular section once, that was exciting.

I did stuff like, for example, one day, we had a dead American citizen and somebody had to go through the motions on the paperwork. They pulled me out, they gave me the paperwork, and sent me out in the Embassy car. The serious employees advised me: this British official says this, you said that, then they say this, you say that, then you get the death certificate and you bring it back. And I said, Okay!

Q: Did it go that smoothly?

MCAULEY: It went that smoothly.

Q: Oh, okay.

MCAULEY: Occasionally I had to go out to the Embassy warehouse in the suburbs, which was sort of like the last scene of later Raiders of the Lost Ark or Citizen Kane. Apparently, there had been a lawsuit, which meant they couldn't throw out any refusals for years. Once a week or so, I would have to go out with a list of four or five names and find them amongst literally tens of thousands of refusals. I thought this was normal at the time, taking public transit on Embassy business, because there was no embassy driver. I just took the subway out there.

Q: Well, it depends on the embassy, a lot of them especially in Europe, when political appointees come from after running a business and they look at the money being spent on motorpool, they see a very safe array of taxis. Then they are like, we are doing what?

MCAULEY: I had no problem, it cost me £2.50 for a round trip. And I got four or five trips then I vouchered it and I got £12.50 back, it just seemed normal to me.

Q: Were there any irritations that the British put in the way of US diplomats? You probably didn't have a dog?

MCAULEY: No, aside from people shouting "Fascist!" at me in front of the embassy.

The British were not so friendly, so we didn't get to know our neighbors. The apartment had been rented for us, specifically. The bathtub apparently was not caulked sufficiently. When we took a shower, it dripped on our neighbors. What I would be used to from Boston is that the neighbor would stomp up to the apartment and say, "What are you doing here? Get that fixed!"

The British didn't do this. Instead, the people who rented the apartment below us called their landlord, their landlord called the representative of the other place, and they called embassy GSO and embassy GSO called us and said, three days ago, your bathtub leaked. At one time, we got the message that we were being accused of showering in an inconsiderate manner, which I thought was funny. I laughed, that was the wrong response. Eventually, we figured out that the tub needed to be recaulked. But again, it was my first tour. I didn't know any better.

Q: It sounds like a really gentle way to join the State Department.

MCAULEY: Right.

Q: So then Susan got her next assignment?

MCAULEY: Yeah, Bucharest, Romania. We understood that London was super easy, and we had fun, everything like that. And we were going to go somewhere probably much more difficult. But Bucharest, we felt like, Oh, well, it's still in Europe. How bad could it be?

Q: Famous last words.

MCAULEY: That was our first language training. We came back in January, had our first training in Roslyn where they rented out office space in various different buildings. I was able to get language training also.

Q: Did you know at that time, you would have a job at the embassy in Bucharest? Or was this like, this was like a prerequisite?

MCAULEY: There was no guarantee. We just asked for language training. Basically everybody who asked got to do language training. When you got to Soviet-era Eastern Europe, it made sense because life was hard there, even with the language skills. There were like, twelve of us learning Romanian, which was a world record for people learning Romanian at the same time, I think.

It was something I didn't realize was unusual, but we had an incredibly high morale in language class. Everybody got along with each other. There were no prima donnas, getting upset because they couldn't learn the language or that they felt they had been disrespected. Everybody was super, super nice to each other, we all got along really well.

I was really pleased because I had never learned a language well enough to speak it before. I said to myself, this is it, even if it's an obscure language like Romanian, I am going to be able to speak Romanian fluently. I was pretty motivated.

My wife is smarter than me, and something happened which subsequently happened many, many times in our alliance together. After the first week, they separate out people. Susan was in the class of people who had natural talent for language. I was in the other class. It's probably just as well, because this way you don't spend so much time in a small airless room with your wife. We learned that Romanian is not actually a very, very hard language. It has the Latin alphabet and it is a romance language. Unlike French, Romanians were just thrilled that you made the effort to learn their language, even if you spoke it badly. So there was a lot of positive reinforcement there.

Q: A lot of Spanish speakers are like that too.

MCAULEY: I'm sure.

The Romanian teachers at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) were connected with the dissident movement in their native country in some way or another. They often were really, really angry with the government. We made a joke but it had truth in it. If we were tired and we wanted to end class early, all you had to do was mention Franklin Delano Roosevelt, at which point the Romanian teachers would go off on an angry tirade in Romanian, speaking faster than we could understand, about Yalta.

Q: They were angry.

MCAULEY: Then we didn't have to speak Romanian for the rest of the day.

Q: Tricky!

MCAULEY: Yeah, but mostly, we got along really well. Even years afterwards, we had a good relationship with the teachers. I'm sad to say that I haven't seen them in a few years. But really, until I would say, twenty years after we learned the language, we were still seeing the teachers sometimes.

Q: And everybody in the class was going to Romania, was going to Bucharest?

MCAULEY: Yes, that was the only post at that time.

Q: Where did you live? Were you in Clarendon?

MCAULEY: Rented an apartment in Clarendon. Again, I didn't know any better. So we just had an ad in the newspaper and we rented an apartment, which Clarendon was quite different at the time. It was certainly within our budget.

Q: And the metro was open then.

MCAULEY: Yeah. The only other thing that I think about now is, that was the first time I saw seventeen-year cicadas, which we're going to see again in a few weeks here.

Q: Yeah, that's quite an experience when it happens. This was in 1986?

MCAULEY: Yeah. Wait, 1987. We got there in the summer of 1987.

Q: So you went to Bucharest. Before you got there, did you apply for a position? A family member position or did that happen when you got there?

MCAULEY: It happened when I got there. It was really a shock to go there. Mr. Ceausescu and his family, the dictatorship, I don't think I'm being too melodramatic when I say they had the people by the throat. Life was really, really hard for them. For us, it was okay. You probably know, in those days, you had to be able to entertain yourself in a way that is not really necessary now, even in the most isolated places.

Q: Yeah, there was no US TV available.

MCAULEY: Yes, that's right.

Q: No US movies.

MCAULEY: There was one television channel. The first year we were there, it was on for two hours a day. And for the second, except Sundays, it was on for three hours.

Q: They didn't have many restaurants or bars. It was a very poor country that was strangled at that time.

MCAULEY: Sad thing was, we were able to read that a generation ago in the 1920s, it was called the Paris of the east. And generally considered quite a comfortable and beautiful place to live. It's one thing to hear about it, it's another thing to see it. Literally nothing for sale, people lining up for anything, sometimes joining lines for things that nobody knew what was for sale, but whatever it is, they buy it, because if they didn't need it, they could trade it.

Q: I used to hear those stories when I was studying Russian, but I thought they were hyperbole.

MCAULEY: Then you see it for yourself. Romanians fist fighting on the street over the last bag of chicken feet in the store. You can't help but be changed by seeing that a little bit.

Q: At this time, it was a communist era, we didn't have an AID program or anything that we could do to help.

MCAULEY: This was way back in the Cold War. Mr. Ceausescu had established a certain amount of independence from the Soviet Union, things he had done decades earlier, when he criticized the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. He had allowed Romanian athletes to participate in the 1980 Los Angeles Olympics. He was considered like a little maverick in the Union. We were supposed to be friendly and encouraged him to break off from the Soviet bloc. We weren't supposed to antagonize people obviously. The idea was that we were supposed to be friendly with the government, in spite of what was happening.

Q: Did the city still have any architecture from the earlier Paris of the East?

MCAULEY: Yeah, I mean, it had some very beautiful sections. One of the things that we did is that my wife went down and took pictures of an enormous section, which was mostly the Jewish section, it had just been completely bulldozed and created what was known at that time as the Victory of Socialism Boulevard. The idea was that you're going to have an enormous Champs-Élysées is leading to this enormous, enormous legislature building. By the time of 1988, when it was partially completed, the buildings were already looking bad because they had been made with substandard material.

Q: It was as the winter came and got cold, right?

MCAULEY: It did.

Q: They had power problems.

MCAULEY: Yeah. Once or twice during the coldest days, the water on the surface of the toilet bowl had frozen overnight. We bought big warm blankets, hats, gloves, and things. We had heat pumps to keep up with the winter.

Q: I think by this time, you knew enough to call the GSO when you had a problem.

MCAULEY: I know, I could have called the GSO. But I wouldn't call the GSO and say my apartment is cold. I knew that everybody else's apartments were cold too. They already gave us space heaters. You had to put the space heaters on separate circuits. Sometimes if you were running a space heater and you turned on a light, it blew the circuit. That was obviously nothing that anybody in GSO could do.

Q: I guess I might have some wrong information. I was expecting you to say "because I was with the GSO."

MCAULEY: Oh, no. I worked in the political section, and I worked in the consular section.

Q: Okay.

MCAULEY: As you know, my wife was the Human Rights officer. It was just an amazing opportunity. Because she traveled all over the country seeking out religious leaders. Whenever she went, I went, because people didn't travel by themselves. Of course, we didn't take local employees with us. They would probably inform the government about you. If the local employees tried to shield you by not giving a lot of information about you, they would get in trouble.

So, my wife and I rode all over Romania and saw people who were religious dissidents and leaders. One of the things the Ceausescu government did was to oppress the Protestant religious minority, often Baptists. For example, they would find some technical zoning violation on the church building that a Baptist church had tried to expand and then use that as an excuse to try to bulldoze the building. We visited people whose response was to occupy the half-bulldozed building 24/7. So I remember one of the first weeks we were there, we went to a place called Bistritsa. There was a half-bulldozed building, which was overflowing with people for our visit. There was my wife and I, and another female officer and her husband. We were all invited to stand up and make a speech in Romanian, which we had not planned for. But I went ahead and did it anyway. The problem was, they really wanted the men to stand up, which was ridiculous because the women were the officers, but they wanted the men to make a speech. So I stood up. I

don't quite recall what I said. But I didn't say anything usually embarrassing. I got an enormous round of applause at the end.

Q: So did you do consular work first or after your political?

MCAULEY: I did consular work first and political work second.

Q: Consular was similar to what you had done in London?

MCAULEY: Oh, no, quite the opposite, London was sort of a busy job. In Bucharest, people were prevented from coming in. In some cases, if they were organized enough, I could meet people outside and they would walk next to me, then let them in. This was something we planned. You went to the Marine security guard who was watching the door and said, "We're escorting somebody in, because they're having trouble getting in. Can you watch your camera? As soon as you see me, can you open the door so we're not hanging around out there?" The marines were always happy to do that. We'd go out around the corner down the street, meet somebody and walk back together, right by the security guards, into the building.

Q: The volume was way low.

MCAULEY: We would have had an enormously high refusal rate, except at the time that the government of Romania was doing our work for us, because they just refused to issue passports to people. You had to get a passport and then you had to have a Romanian exit visa. That took a long, long time. Sometimes people just couldn't get a passport.

Q: Within the section, you were looking at the visas, or the paperwork was there and everything? You were actually adjudicating again.

MCAULEY: Yeah. Again, I didn't have any training at all.

I'm gonna get up and show you something. I went through old citizenship files, these stuff were literally decades old. They said, go through it, determine whether any of it is relevant, if not, go to the paper shredder and shred everything.

Q: Yeah, I can't wait to see what you're going to show me.

MCAULEY: This is a passport issued by Secretary of State Charles Hughes in 1922.

Q: Wow. It's a passport.

MCAULEY: It's a passport, it was like two sheets of 8 1/2 by 11 paper joined at the sides.

Q: Okay.

MCAULEY: Anton Kampf is the name on this passport. He apparently was a guy who had gone to America and had lived in America long enough to get citizenship. Then he decided to come back to Eastern Europe. He was in southwestern Romania, if I remember correctly, like Timișoara. He was an ethnic German. According to Embassy files, his remaining relations in Romania were his great grandchildren, I think. They had tried a decade or more before to make a citizenship claim. They had brought this passport in as evidence and it had laid in the file for a long time. I hope the statute of limitations has run out because I was supposed to destroy that. But instead, I actually sent it to my parents in the mail and my parents had it framed.

Q: Okay. All right. I'm taking note of that, because as part of the spouse project, we're working with a young officer who's doing a fellowship to put together a digital display of artifacts. So maybe, if you don't mind, just send me a photo and I can send it to Claire and see if she'd be interested.

MCAULEY: Okay, I'll send you a photo. I tell her that if she wants a better quality photo of it, I would be happy to have it unframed.

Q: I know it's pretty complicated. I always thought it was easy to take frames off. Then you realize there's a paper behind. But it was a passport that was created in 1922.

MCAULEY: Yeah. So Mr. Kampf was born in 1875, the passport is actually dated July 28, 1921. It's signed by Charles Evans Hughes. It has entry and exit stamps from Austria and Hungary and a bunch of other stamps and marks that are indecipherable.

Q: It's just a piece of paper, isn't it?

MCAULEY: I love documents. I was just supposed to feed it into the paper shredder, and it just seemed a shame.

Q: That's right. I'm sure they did a good thing. So when you got there, they said, we need somebody to work in the consular section.

MCAULEY: Actually, they were scooping up everybody. This is how I interpreted it. They were scooping up everybody and finding something for them to do, so we wouldn't

get in trouble in the embassy. I mean, there was literally nothing to do. There were no classes to take outside the Embassy, no outside work opportunities.

Many crazy measures were taken in order for Mr. Ceaușescu to save money to pay off the foreign debt that he believed was oppressing his country. For example, there were hardly any streetlights on, it was pitch dark, even in the center of the city.

Q: Did you feel that the leadership of the embassy treated staff in this kind of difficult circumstance?

MCAULEY: Very well, but it took it for granted. Well, again, I didn't know any better. I didn't know it was exceptional at the time. Roger Kirk, whose name I still remember, was the ambassador. He was a great ambassador, morale was really high at the embassy, which, again, I just thought this was normal. I thought all embassies were like this.

Q: Did they have you over?

MCAULEY: Sure. They had receptions and things, they had a pool in their house that they allowed people to use. It was right around the corner from where I lived. I lived in a socialist housing block but it was very luxurious by Romanian standards of the time. We lived on the eighth floor and we had an elevator that only worked occasionally. It smelled funny, but we had enough room and the apartment was not terrible. Later on, I would discover that people who had been in the Foreign Service longer considered it deeply inadequate.

Q: So, do you remember the deputy chief mission by chance?

MCAULEY: Oh, the deputy chief of mission was a man named Henry Clarke.

Roger Kirk is the son of a pretty famous diplomat, who I understand, was a military attache in the Soviet Union during the time of the Stalinist purges in the 1930s, was a big figure at the time. So he was like a Foreign Service kid. I remember one of the things that really impressed me. All junior officers were invited to a reception, it was outside, like springtime. We saw him speaking Russian and dancing with the Russian DCM's wife. I remember, wow, he could speak Russian and dance. I could not do either one. I remember years later, when we were in Moldova, he came to visit, on something semi-official with his wife, and I got to tell his wife exactly what I've told you there. She was clearly very pleased that I had such a memory. But, again, we didn't realize how wonderful he was. He was really professional. He was a very dapper guy who was always in a suit and a tie, he

was not unfriendly. He was very nice, but he also gave people some room. You realize that people didn't want the ambassador hanging around all the time. Right?

Q: I learned that pretty late. I was at a dinner and something with desserts. And I said, "Oh, I have to go over to the greenhouse." One of the congressmen, I think, said at the dinner to me, "Make sure you don't stay more than an hour, people don't like the boss to stay more than an hour, that's a good rule."

MCAULEY: Yeah, everybody loved Roger Kirk.

Q: That's good. And then what did you do when you moved to a political section?

MCAULEY: In the political section, I supervised the FSN (Foreign Service National), who was writing the Daily Press summary. I got a big stack of Romanian newspapers, not only from the Capitol, but from every little region, the equivalent of a county. Each had its own party newspaper. I actually read stuff myself. As I said, there was not a lot to do. We did a daily press summary, which was distributed around the embassy, but also went to other embassies and a lot of embassies came back with positive feedback. Not every place had a Foreign Service Institute, so many countries had diplomats coming to Bucharest who didn't really speak Romanian. They liked the U.S. Embassy press summary. Well, what happens is the local employees tend to do the press summaries in English, but they are not usually well written, because English is not their native language. But the local employee in Romania was spectacular. She wrote well. Occasionally, I felt that perhaps she might remove some things. She might overlook some things. Because if she had been too pointed in her analysis, the people from the government who control her would say, why did you have to include this? Why did you neglect this? We never discussed this, but I would read things and I would say, "why didn't you notice X, Y, and Z?" She would say, "Sorry." I would tell her to put some particular item. If her handler said, why did you put this thing that made us look bad? She said, well, my boss insisted.

Q: So, she got along pretty well.

MCAULEY: Yes.

Q: Were you thinking she was having a report in at the end of the day, or was there some electronic surveillance going on?

MCAULEY: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there's incontrovertible evidence that all local employees had to report regularly. Later rumors and other information came

back about certain people who were more enthusiastic about informing than others. At that time, our security people told you, everybody is reporting on you. You should assume that your house is bugged for audio. But the guy got the most harassment and the closest surveillance was the CIA station chief, who, apparently, they knew. I clearly didn't merit that sort of attention.

Q: But nobody came into your apartment when you were gone and moved the furniture to piss you off or anything?

MCAULEY: Not that I could tell, but maybe it happened. I didn't pay attention to it. It seems like you, if you thought about it too much, you'd be making yourself more aggravated than you needed to be. I would say I had a funny sort of CIA-related incident when I was there, which is the only time I ever got mixed up in any of that serious stuff. One of the things I started doing in Romania was going to church regularly because the Church of England had a church in Bucharest, because Queen Marie of Romania, one of the last Queen of Romania who was the granddaughter of Queen Victoria. They had an Anglican Church in the center of Bucharest, and a priest who was the personal envoy of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Patriarchate in Bucharest. He was sort of half protected by the British Embassy, and was also a troublemaker who met with people. So we ended up there, met with the British community and got to know people.

The reason I'm mentioning all of this is that I eventually became the treasurer of the church. I would normally keep all of the books and all of the strongbox with money at the embassy, but one weekend I brought it home in order to reconcile the accounts. When I brought it into the embassy, I parked my car temporarily in front of the embassy. Then I have to come back out to move the car off the street into the embassy parking lot. When I came off the street, an incredibly nervous woman ran up to me and pushed an envelope in my hand and said, "Give this to the ambassador, it's very important," then she ran off. Of course, I met a lot of people who said how important they are and how they're persecuted. I just thought she was another one of those. I parked my car, came back and sat down, I opened up the envelope, and I read her message in broken English. I said, "Hmm, well, this might be something." So I brought it to my boss. I could tell from the way he looked at it, it just wasn't another routine case. It turned out to be the wife of an important person.

Q: Did you think she defected? Or?

MCAULEY: I think that later on, she got to leave the country. This was in 1989. We left in the summer of 1989, about three months before the shooting started. Of course, we had

no idea this all was going to happen. Anybody who tells you they foresaw the collapse of the Soviet Union. They're lying.

Romania was a fascinating experience. I spoke more than once in front of churches. One time I felt like I didn't do a very good job. Later, I apologized to the head of the church. He said, "David, don't worry, they just want to see a free man." That is occasionally Susan and I have traded this remark to each other in certain circumstances.

Q: Public speaking is hard right at first? You get used to it over time and then doing it in another language you should be proud. That's a great emblematic story about what life was like then.

MCAULEY: Something that I am amazed about is that no one has ever done a PhD thesis about the Kent economy.

Q: Yeah. Susan told me about it in her oral history, but why don't you tell your readers? What is the Kent economy?

MCAULEY: Kent De Luxe 100 soft packs only. That was the black market currency.

Q: Soft packs only.

MCAULEY: Right! It had to be a specific type of cigarette to be used as the de facto black market currency. Because if I understand correctly, as a Romanian at that time, if you actually possessed genuine dollars, and they caught you in possession of foreign currency without a permit, you went to jail. But if you were a Romanian, and you possessed packs of Kent De Luxe 100 soft packs, that was completely legal. That turned into the black market currency. The estimates of my mind that I remember, I felt that I bought about \$7 or \$8 in goods and services for each package, even though it would cost us less than \$1. We had a support flight that came in every three months, and we got a lot of our food there. We were allowed to order one case of this type of cigarette only. Because they didn't want people going wild on the black market.

I'm a big guy, I'm six foot two with big hands. Sometimes if my wife worked late, she would need to have the family car. To get home, I would get a pack out of my stash, when a taxi came along, I could palm it in my hand. The driver could see it and the taxi always stopped. But my only problem was sometimes they kicked the person out of the taxi, I felt bad about it. Then they just took me home and they paid the meter themselves, they felt happy doing it.

Q: So that's just worth \$7 or \$8. That was a very big fare.

MCAULEY: That was my guess.

Q: Did you buy things? I think she told me you once bought suits?

MCAULEY: Oh, I got loads of suits. When I got back here. People could tell that they were Eastern European suits and eventually I had to get rid of them.

Q: And you were using a carton of cigarettes?

MCAULEY: 10 packs in a carton, we did that.

Q: Was it widespread practice in other embassies?

MCAULEY: At other embassies? Of course! But we had all these rules that we had to follow, like the admin counselor (who later became our ambassador to Moldova) was strict about changing money. We had to change money at the official rate, which was 10% of the black market rate. Eventually, people figured out ways around that. Then things cost a reasonable amount. But if you did everything on the official rate, it was a very expensive place to live.

Q: Anyway, Romania had a reputation for suits and other apparel.

MCAULEY:

We bought a rug with Kent Deluxe 100 soft packs. Other black market stuff, like selling your used diplomatic car was a hot topic at social occasions.

We sold our car to the Consul General of Lebanon. He gave us, I've forgotten how much it was, I believe it was the equivalent of 300 to \$500 in Romanian currency, six months in advance, so we could spend it. Because the Lebanese Consul General could buy it with black market currency, the car costs 10 times less than the official price. Then the embassy would buy our Romanian currency at the official rates.

Q: That was good.

MCAULEY: That was the year I had to declare a capital gain on selling my car.

Q: Oh my.

MCAULEY: It helped because we didn't save any money in London. We started to save money in Romania.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say about Bucharest? Where did you guys next?

MCAULEY: Again, we had no idea what was coming. In retrospect, I'm glad I experienced Soviet-era Eastern Europe. But of course at the time I complained incessantly. My poor wife had to listen to me complain all the time.

We had a joke with the guy who was the Gunny – the head of the Marine security guard detachment. They were normally there for only one year. Weekly, we played in a diplomatic darts league with the Marine team. So he would talk about how he was going to leave Bucharest before we would, hahaha. But he kept getting postponed because they couldn't find another Marine Sergeant to come to Romania. We ended up on the same plane leaving. An hour in, when we neared the border, he ran up and locked himself in the bathroom in the front of the plane. So he could leave Romania before we did.

Q: Was a really close knit group, wasn't it?

MCAULEY: I just don't think now that everybody has the internet, you aren't going to have that sort of same relationship now.

Q: So, you left in 1989, as Germany was starting to—?

MCAULEY: Yeah, the Berlin Wall was only just starting to happen. There was a bit allowing Hungarians to go to Austria, and things like that.

Q: So you were leaving just right before Eastern Europe started to explode. And I'm sure it was nice to get home.

MCAULEY: It was.

Q: The next tour was domestic or international?

MCAULEY: It was domestic. Susan was a Bulgaria and Albania Desk Officer during the collapse of the Soviet Union. That was quite a bit of work for her. At that time, there was one person for Bulgaria and Albania. She opened the embassy in Albania. I would have to say that it was a little bit of a difficult time in our marriage, because she just had the type of Washington job where you had to work until 10 o'clock every night.

Q: Oh, no! That late?

MCAULEY: I could have been more understanding. We didn't have terrible arguments, I just didn't get it at the time. At first, I didn't have a job and I was just at home. Eventually, I got a civil service position at the Operations Center.

I worked for more than two years in the Operations Center. An operation center team with five Foreign Service officers and a civil servant. I was a civil servant. I worked nights, weekends, and graveyard shifts. That was very exciting.

Q: Did you do that for the full two years?

MCAULEY: Yes.

Q: You went through the Berlin Wall falling and all the changes in Europe and then the breakup of the Soviet Union.

MCAULEY: While the Berlin Wall had already fallen by the time I started at the Operations Center. The first week was right before Christmas. And the first week was the death of Ceausescu, which was just incredible for me. If you recall this, one of the symbols of the revolution was the Romanian flag with the hole cut in it. The Romanian communist flag was the three color flag with the communist symbol in the middle. People cut out the hole and paraded with the flag with the hole. We had a flag which we had bought with Kent Deluxe 100 soft packs. (I remember that the guy from the mailroom could get you enormous Romanian flags. He said, my price is two cartons of Kent Deluxe 100s soft pack, one for me, one for my friend.) We brought the flag with the hole in it and hung it up in the taskforce room.

Q: Oh, wow. Do you still have that?

MCAULEY: I don't think so. Although my wife may have it, I'll ask her.

Q: Okay. So tell us what you do in your work in the operation center?

MCAULEY: The name of my job was operation assistant. There was a dedicated, closed fax system between the highest government agencies. That was the portal I received classified faxes, I sent them, I routed them, I called people and told them that they were here. I pushed papers various ways. I wasn't the first person to answer the phone, often Foreign Service officers answered the phone first, especially when the lines that the principles used. If all the phones were ringing, all hands on desk. I got to do some fun

stuff when James Baker was the Secretary of State. During that time, we were mobilizing for the first Gulf War. One day, he was making calls to all the foreign ministers of Europe. The operation center was tasked with doing memoranda of conversation. He was doing them one after another. I showed up for my shift, four people working on memoranda of conversation already. And there was another one about to happen, is there anyone who's free. I raised my hand, I sat down, then I did a memorandum of conversation with James Baker, and the Italian foreign minister.

Of course, because he was the Italian foreign minister, he was much more entertaining than all the other foreign ministers, and so was my memorandum of conversation. He said lots of crazy stuff and my memcon was great. But people in my position wouldn't normally do anything connected with the Secretary themselves. I got to do that once. I was there, the very certain historical moments. I remember I was at the Operations Center at 4:45 on Thanksgiving morning when Mrs. Thatcher resigned. The Secretary and his party were in Oman, or UAE or someplace like that. What was formerly a very quiet shift became an effort to get as much information as possible. It was ridiculous. It was 4:45 on Thanksgiving morning, but she was the Prime Minister of England. In the State Department culture, everybody wants to be notified. So you call people all over Washington, at 4:45 on Thanksgiving morning to say that Margaret Thatcher has resigned.

Q: And they appreciate that.

MCAULEY: Some of them appreciated it more than others.

We faxed the Secretary's party all the information we had. Baker got out of a meeting with some foreign ministers and his aides had a sheaf of newswires to hand to him. Then, when he walked out, the reporters ambushed him, but he knew about it already, he didn't look surprised.

Q: Right, did you all have CNN on TV yet? Or not yet?

MCAULEY: Yeah, but I will tell you that those midnight shifts, usually between like 1:30 and 3:30 in the morning, we would bring in, this is how long ago, was a VHS cassette, we'd watch a nice movie.

Especially, it was the morning of Thanksgiving Day. We were watching a movie at the moment. Luckily, I had this screen for news bulletins. It spit out bulletins automatically while we were watching. A lot of those bulletins were domestic issues, which we had

nothing to do with. But I picked this bulletin up and it's like, okay, no more movie, the rest of the shift was taken up with that.

Q: I've been interviewing a couple people and I've been editing the older transcripts. People always like to mention other people who worked with them in the Ops (Operation) Center that then went on to great heights. So do you remember who was working with you?

MCAULEY: Masha Yovanovitch, she was part of my team. She was a lovely person, clearly very, very serious. She's a really formidable intellect. She didn't take herself very seriously, I felt. She was a fine human being and enjoyed a good laugh. It was all very funny when we saw her on the news during the Trump-era madness. Years before Trump, I ran into her one time in probably the early 2000s on the FSI shuttle bus to Roslyn. My wife and I had lunch with her. It must have been less than 10 years ago. Oh, she visited Bulgaria when we were there. I mean, she visited the embassy, she didn't stay in our house.

It was very interesting to see her at the Senate hearing. I think she did a great job in all the very difficult circumstances she found herself in during the Trump administration.

The director of the Operations Center when I was there was a lady named Kristie Kenney. She went on to be ambassador to four, five places. Her last one, I believe, was Thailand, after we were in Thailand. And Steve Mull, who has been an Ambassador a bunch of times, including to Poland. Now he is at the University of Virginia. He was the deputy director of the Op Center when I was there. A lot of people at the Op Center became ambassadors and on the news and stuff like that.

Q: It's always fun to have that kind of camaraderie, because the Ops (Operations) center is kind of like your first post or whatever. It's one of those really founding experiences.

MCAULEY: I'm going to tell a sort of a slightly negative story about somebody who I will not name. This was a person who, like a lot of people in the State Department, went to very fancy schools, Ivy League schools and stuff. But at one point, he made a colossal error. Three days later, he transferred out to a more prestigious job at the Deputy Secretary of State's office. He had already had a job. Then later on, he was an ambassador. So go figure.

Q: Yeah, some of those mistakes do have a lot of ramifications. But hopefully, we learn from them, and we recover.

MCAULEY: I really enjoyed lots of people there, especially because members of your team. Sometimes our team would have Tuesday and Wednesday off, so you would go to the Birchmere, Alexandria, to hear a concert on Tuesday evening, with members of your team.

Q: So, did you have to do the two days on two days off? How did you do with shift work? You're now in your 30s, Maybe?

MCAULEY: I didn't have any problem with it. I had actually done shift work when I was at university too when I was a security guard. I really didn't mind it. I think I handled it a lot better than some. There were some people who could not sleep on the midnight shift days, and they would just come in and be miserable.

Q: Right? You just never know that until you've done it. Whether or not you're good at it or not. I guess maybe it's an acquired gift?

MCAULEY: No, it never bothered me personally. I actually had no trouble.

Q: And so much of this was happening and part of the world that you'd already been thinking about, but describe working in the Ops Center as something really opens up your mind, your understanding of the State Department, you find it really enlightening.

MCAULEY: The first Gulf War took place while I was there. That was quite exciting. For example, I have memories of the time when Iraq launched Scud missiles against Israel. We had this machine, people pointed and said, that's our special message machine from the NSA (National Security Agency). But it normally never did anything, which I interpreted as the world is okay. Then, during the Gulf War, whenever Iraq launched a Scud missile, the NSA machine, that was the first time it worked, and it went off with this ear-piercing-shriek and issued out a piece of paper. In short, it said that Iraq had launched a Scud missile. By the time the piece of paper had printed, CNN was on saying, "A Scud missile has landed in Israel." I judged that the NSA machine was roughly 45 to 60 seconds ahead of CNN. I don't think it really gave us a significant advantage. During any crisis, the paperwork at the Ops Center was coming hard and fast from all of the faxes and all of the printers and then this crazy machine would go off with an ear-piercing shriek.

As far as the fighting goes, it was done relatively quickly. But of course, there were all the problems with the pollution and oil wells and everything. That was ongoing the entire time when we were there.

Q: Right, your role stayed the same. A lot of paper, and then with the phones when they needed help. And you were doing some writing.

MCAULEY: Yeah, but very little writing.

Q: But you're seeing a lot of good writing?

MCAULEY: Yes, I was. Also, you saw things like, you got to understand the most significant bits of State Department culture. I understood how important a NODIS was. (A NODIS is a designation for diplomatic cable which means "no distribution", but these types of cables got the most attention.)

At that time, my wife was working as the Bulgaria desk officer. We were discussing work one time at home, she said, "We just can't get the attention of the principals on the seventh floor. We have to write something, how do we get their attention?" I said, "Send it NODIS!" And so she passed along to the ambassador and that was the beginning of NODIS cables from the embassy in Bulgaria. If you want somebody to pay attention to something, you have to whisper it.

Q: Tricks of the trade.

MCAULEY: I also did other things to help my wife. Later my wife had been instrumental in establishing relations with Tirana. I was working a midnight shift. I forgot exactly what happened. But the establishment of relations with Albania had become a news item. The chatter on the lines was that all of Baker's staff were convinced that this was something the State Department had done behind Baker's back. And of course, since my wife had been intimately involved in it, I knew that this was not the case, that she had all of her paperwork in order. The Secretary and his party were in the Middle East at the time. And my wife's boss came into the Ops Center, he knew me. He got some documents, then left. I went out after him and grabbed him by the shirt in the hallway, which is something I would normally not do. I said, "Chatter last night is that people think this has not been done properly. Have all of your documents that show you've done everything according to the rules, probably it's best if you just carry them around in your hand. Or have it in the top drawer of your desk." He went downstairs and said to my wife, "My highly-placed seventh floor source has told me to get ready." I did this because I'm on the same team with my wife.

Q: Good. You made sure they were doing okay. Then what happened from the Ops?

MCAULEY: The thing about the Ops Center was, of course, you meet people.

The Soviet Union collapsed. I ended up getting an excursion tour as a genuine diplomat. This was the only time when I put the word diplomat on my tax return. I had an actual FS (Foreign Service) grade. My assignment happened because the US was opening up all of the embassies in the former Soviet Union.

My wife and I opened up the embassy in Moldova and worked there for three years. At that time (maybe she told you this), she was actually assigned to go to Yugoslavia to Belgrade. But somebody who worked in the Operations Center who I had worked with, I never thought that he liked me very much, but he seemed to like me well enough to send me to the former Soviet Union. Maybe he didn't like me.

Anyway, word came down that basically they were looking for volunteers. And I spoke to him, he had been on my team at the Ops Center. He knew I had been to Romania and I spoke Romanian. So we talked, he said, "You speak Romanian, you want to go work in Moldova?" I said, "Sure". He said, "I can get you a Foreign Service job." I said, "Okay, what about my wife?" "I'll get her a Foreign Service job too, I will get you both posted there."

Q: So this was a case where they wanted you.

MCAULEY: Yeah. I said to him, "But my wife got an assignment in Belgrade. She's already started language training." He said, "We'll break her assignment." The Director General walked down to the assignment panel and broke my wife's assignment. No problem. "I've got a blank check to just get people out there," he told me. That's exactly what happened.

Q: So even though things have been tough in Bucharest, you were ready to go back for more and Moldova?

MCAULEY: Well, it was cool and it was unknown.

Q: It was an adventure.

MCAULEY: At that time, we had a joke about how if you weren't walking fast enough down the corridor of the State Department, they might come up behind you, chloroform you, and you'd wake up on a plane to Moscow. Of course, people didn't speak all of the languages of the new republics, right? We didn't have anybody who spoke Kyrgyzstan or Latvia. Anybody who learned Russian got sent to those places because you could get by. But when you got to Moldova, anybody who had learned Romanian could go. So anyone

who had served in Romania for the last 30 years went (at least temporarily), or so it seemed.

Q: It was a really big push because they were going from just having Moscow and maybe a couple of consulates. To having 15 embassies and still keep the consulates.

MCAULEY: Right. We spoke Romanian and were able to get some Romanian brush up classes. Sure enough, they broke Susan's assignment. I remember the Bureau was quite upset about it, but as it turned out, by the time we were getting to Moldova, they were drawing down the embassy anyway. Life was even harder in Belgrade at the time, so no regrets at all about that.

Q: So when you were in Moldova, you said the Bureau was upset, that was the European Bureau around that time. In 1992, they created something called S/NIS. So Strobe Talbott came in, they made him special coordinator for the former Soviet Union. The word came out, Baker wants embassies in all these places.

MCAULEY: Oh, yeah, Talbott was after we started the Embassy. I remember we had a reception for Clinton's election.

Q: That's right. So you were going to the political section?

MCAULEY: No, I had a GSO (General Services Officer)/consular rotation in Chisinau. The three years we were there. There were no Visa Services until the last year I was there, it was just American Citizen Services. I was the consular officer for American Citizen Services, then GSO. Being GSO was just an incredibly difficult job. The last time Chişinău was the capital of anything was 1504.

Q: 1504?

MCAULEY: That was the last time it was the capital of an independent country. We were just winging it – both of us, the Moldovans and the US Embassy. I have to admit the message that I got – informally – was if you don't do anything really embarrassing or steal from the government, you don't have to abide by all these silly government rules. Just go ahead and start the embassy and we'll take care of the paperwork later.

We hired people off the streets. If they spoke enough English to us, they were hired, especially because the Department sent some officers who didn't have Russian or Romanian, so we needed help. Moldovans walked in, they said, I want to work here. I spoke to them for five minutes and many seemed bright enough.

First thing I did was I sat them down. I said, "See that phone? When our phone rings, answer it, figure out who it is, come and tell me." That was the first week. I hired lots of people. I hired the cleaning staff. The former Soviet Union all over is very muddy. At the end of the first week I looked around. The Embassy building was filthy, I was like, "Damn, I forgot to hire cleaning staff." Over the weekend, I said to myself, the first two ladies who come in, they are going to be the lucky winners of a job as char staff at the embassy. The first one who came in was really a little old Slavic lady and I hired her, turns out she had certain mental illness problems. But she worked at the Embassy the entire time I was there and she was personally loyal to me. She would have stopped a bullet for me.

Q: It was hard times and this was as lucky a break as possible.

MCAULEY: She had certain mental problems. She argued with people unnecessarily but she always came in on time, she was always mopping the floor. Actually for six months, her job included cooking. We had borscht every day for lunch for the embassy staff. We had like a couple of hot plates, very improvisational, she made borscht every day for lunch after she mopped the floors. It was delicious.

MCAULEY: She was the first lady I hired. A few minutes after I had hired her, another lady came in. This lady had a nicer look. She was younger and had better clothes. She didn't speak any English, she spoke Romanian. Her experience was in accountancy. It's like, I'm sorry, we don't have a job for you. She was disappointed and leaving. Then she ran into the other lady. Chisinau is kind of a small place. She knew her, and the first lady told her, "Great news! I have a job at the American Embassy." She came back to me and said, "Why did you hire her but you didn't hire me?" I said, "Look, she's going to sweep, clean the floor. You have university education, you don't want to mop the floors?" She said, "Yes, I do." She grabbed the mop out of the other lady's hand, and started mopping the floors in her high heels and her skirt. I said, "Great, you're hired." That's how we got the cleaning staff. The second lady turned out to be the wife of the Moldovan President's Special Advisor for Nationality Affairs, which I only learned later because we had a reception. We were there in the reception, I saw her and I grabbed my wife, I said, "What's Valentina the cleaning lady doing here?" Susan said, "Relax, she's the wife of the President's Special Advisor on Nationality Affairs." But she's also working as the char lady at the embassy. Apparently, everybody accepted it. Actually her husband was very grateful because government jobs didn't pay a lot. Valentina was actually a great employee and she kept the other lady under control.

Q: And maybe eventually, she got a job as protocol or something they did.

MCAULEY: Who knows? But that's how we hired people. They walked in, they spoke to us for a minute, we sat them down, that's how we got people.

What else did you have to do to open up the embassy? Well, maybe you have heard from other people about the way Baker did it. He sent somebody. Let's see if I'm recalling his name, an ambassador, Nicholas Salgo was his name. He was a property developer, he did a little property, you may have heard of, called the Watergate. He had the real estate chops to negotiate real estate. He was getting paid \$1 a year. He didn't have to worry about preserving a career or decisions coming back to bite him in the ass later. The plan was: the guy landed, and told the host country government, "We are going to rent an appropriate building from you, we pay the money into a bank account in Washington, DC, you use that money to open up your embassy in DC," which is exactly how it worked. Then they go and show Salgo three buildings, he says this one, and then he's gone. That's how we got the building that formerly belonged to the Moldovan Union of Plastic Artists. Artists were the first people to lose their subsidies in the former Soviet Union. When the Union of Plastic Artists vacated the building, they had ripped everything out, including the toilet. The building was absolutely empty and rundown. It took a while to make it habitable. One problem is that we all spoke Romanian. But people like plumbers and carpenters and electricians, who we needed at the Embassy, were usually monolingual in Russian. That's when I started taking Russian classes.

Q: Your wife was not the only one who specialized in language study.

MCAULEY: I took Russian classes, and I got reasonably good for GSO Russian. Sometimes the plumbers and electricians and policemen and other people I spoke to in Russian were delighted to teach me really, really rude things to say. I learned some rude language, for example, when I went to the airport to pick up the diplomatic pouch every week. The airport wasn't heated. So they taught me, "I am freezing my balls off" in Russian. When my wife didn't want to leave a reception where we were standing around our hats and our coats (also not heated), I threatened to say that to the Foreign Minister.

Even today, Russian is the language that I try to keep up. I have a Duolingo app on my phone, for three years I have practiced it every day, because I just decided that Russian was the language I wanted to retain.

Q: Okay, good afternoon. It's March 22, 2021. And we are continuing our conversation with David McAuley. David, let's pick up with your assignment in Bucharest. So, is there anything else that you want to talk about there?

MCAULEY: I was talking today with my wife, with whom you are doing an oral history project in the morning, and she told you about this. So, it intersects a little with her story, which is about the visit of the Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead (I think John was his first name, if I remember correctly). I think this was in '88. He visited, and at that time, the Ceaușescus and their regime were pretty much international pariahs, and he was the highest-ranking person to visit. We were very much involved in the human rights business. I think I'd talked about this previously, how my wife and I got to drive all over Romania visiting Christian dissidents and half demolished churches and it was all very inspiring. So when Whitehead came, they wanted him to meet some of these troublemakers— that's what we called them. Ironically, they were actually lovely, lovely, courageous people, but just for ease of reference, we called them troublemakers. Specifically, on the day that Whitehead was in Bucharest, the Romanian State Security (which even under normal circumstances was pretty ridiculous) was notched up to maximum absurdity. There were two people, two human rights cases that they wanted Whitehead to see, and one was a man named Liviu Bota, he was a U.N. civil servant who had traveled back to Romania and was being denied permission to leave.

The second one was a Christian human rights lawyer named Nelu Prodan. Of those two, I had only met Bota once before, and I had many, many meetings with Prodan, socializing. My wife said to me, "Okay, your job is you're going to pick up Bota and Prodan, pick them up in our car and drive them," because it was clear if they came any other way, they would be stopped. This was the evening reception at the ambassador's house, at which Mr. Whitehead was the guest of honor. A few days before, we did a dry run so I knew where Bota's house was. I had visited Prodan's house, I knew where Prodan's house was. One thing that my wife always says is that she knows I have a great sense of direction. So even in a confusing place, if they showed me once, I knew where it was.

Q: I'm so envious of people like you.

MCAULEY: I don't know, it just feels normal to me. But now I'm being replaced by Google Maps, so there you go. And so, we had a schedule which said what time we were to rendezvous. The people in question, there was no question about the fact that they were being watched. They would come out on the street, and really, they weren't supposed to wait on the street for very long. We were supposed to be picked up and go. If I remember correctly, Prodan got picked up first, Bota got picked up second. This was in my personal diplomatic car, and we drove to the ambassador's house. Now, all the streets were blocked off. Except because our car was recognizably from the American Embassy, because they had CD [corps diplomatique] plates with them with a certain number on it, and everybody knew you were from the American Embassy. We were let through, and it was wintery and snowy. Actually, it wasn't snowing. It was a cold, clear night, but there was snow on the ground. I just pulled the car near the ambassador's house and ditched the car in the nearest snowdrift I could find. The three of us got out and we started to walk toward the ambassador's house. We hadn't got fifty feet when several policemen came and stopped us and demanded to see the identification cards of the two guests. This is all going on in Romanian. And then the policeman said, "No, no, you'll have to come with us." The UN guy gave him his UN passport and the guy said, "This is a false passport."

Q: Oh, no.

MCAULEY: So I started babbling. I'd thought about my strategy beforehand. One thing about Romanians is that you can talk all you want, and they don't feel they can't interrupt you. I just started babbling, "The ambassador will be very angry, he'll be very angry at me, oh my God I'm gonna lose my job. The ambassador is gonna be so angry at me!" The ambassador wouldn't; I wouldn't lose my job. But the policeman doesn't know that. And so they tried to walk away with the guys and I followed them. And they told me "You don't come," and I told them "Oh, I don't understand. My Romanian isn't so good." I understood completely. I just babbled, talking continuously about how upset the ambassador would be, and please don't take these people, they're guests of the ambassador, and I'm personally responsible. But meanwhile, we're trudging, trudging, trudging somewhere. I don't know where, trudging, trudging in the snow. The policeman, clearly my babbling is not what he wants to hear. He just tells me to be quiet a couple of times, and I just ignore him.

Eventually, we come down the block and around the corner, and there's a police station. We stood outside there. The police guy was joined with people who— you know, there's a difference between uniformed policemen and people who are a member of the secret police, they sort of dressed like bad guys in movies, and all in black, and black hats. And they came along and there was a bit more back and forth. And they started to walk the guys towards the front door of the police station. I came along, and I got in the middle of everybody. They're saying "No, no, not you." I say, "I'm sorry, I have to find out what happens, my ambassador's angry, I'm gonna lose my job." And we just went on and on and on like this. I mean, probably, I said a lot of things that didn't make any sense at all. But it didn't matter, it sort of felt like a filibuster on the Senate floor just filling up the space. And you could actually see the policemen rolling their eyes. What were they going to do? If the diplomat came into the police station, it was like he was being arrested. They said, "Stop here." And they started to talk on walkie-talkies. We sat there, I let things cool down. We just were all silent and looking at each other. There were three or four sort of slow-moving minutes. Then they got some sort of message on the walkie-talkies, and they said, "Follow us," and then they started walking us all back towards the ambassador's house.

Q: So are you in the clear now?

MCAULEY: Well, I'm still with them. I don't know what's going to happen.

Q: Right.

MCAULEY: They pass by a particularly malevolent-looking secret policeman who says, "I see you have a chauffeur from the American Embassy now," in Romanian. We walk, walk, walk, we get the ambassador's house, they let us go in.

Q: Yay.

MCAULEY: I wasn't invited to the reception, actually. None of the other Romanians who were invited, aside from one or two people like the Americas desk officer, were able to attend. So I felt that it was really an achievement to have navigated them in. Susan took me aside for a moment and I said, "I'll tell you all about it when we get home." I turned around, I marched out, I couldn't help it. To the guys who were watching me come out, I said, "I have to leave, I wasn't invited," in Romanian. And I went and got my car and just sort of went home, and I took a really hot bath.

Q: Oh, yeah, you must have been freezing.

MCAULEY: I had a good overcoat, but I was just very nervous.

When you do even small stuff like that, it's very exciting. Because at least for people like me, you see this small group of people at the top making people suffer unnecessarily. For months, you really want to do something, anything, but you realize the embassy doesn't want you to do anything. So this is my chance to do something. Not long after that, literally days after that, they decided to let the UN civil servant Liviu Bota out of the country.

Years and years later, when we were in Laos, we were on vacation, and we came back. These were days where you didn't have phones. If you went on vacation for three weeks, you weren't at your email for three weeks. So my wife came back, and it was an email from a journalist in Vienna, who was doing a story on Bota. She apparently looked all over the world to find my identity, which I eventually communicated to her. There was an article in the English language Vienna newspaper about Liviu Bota and the problems he had had.

Q: Did they make you look like a hero?

MCAULEY: I was only mentioned very briefly. But still it was quite gratifying to know that he remembered it.

And the other guy, Nelu Prodan, actually by that Christmas, he was in a really stinking Romanian prison for a month or so. Eventually, he and his family left also, and last time I heard they were living in Dallas. But both of them got there, both of them got home and they survived and they left Romania. So you heard about this from Susan?

Q: Yeah, no, that's [a] wonderful story. I'm surprised the ambassador didn't bring you into the reception. But in any case—

MCAULEY: I think by that time, I was so spun up, and I wouldn't have been useful to anybody. Everybody from the embassy was there and there were like two Romanians there.

Q: Right, right.

MCAULEY: Yeah, so that's my Romania story that I wanted to talk about.

Q: Thank you. And then, did we talk a little bit about Moldova last time?

MCAULEY: Yes, I think we did. We talked about Moldova, opening the embassy—

Q: And hiring the ladies in the—

MCAULEY: Hiring the ladies, hiring the other people, flying in from Moscow. I think we were the last wave of three groups of new Embassies to open.

I think I heard Susan telling you about how they didn't have any sort of banking infrastructure, so we carried bags of money to Moscow and back. That is true. Of course, Vnukovo Airport in Moscow is filled with people who would gladly cut your throat for twenty-five cents. They put them in bright, bright, orange bags, because if the plane crashed, they wanted to find their money.

Q: So that made it very, very conspicuous.

MCAULEY: Of course everybody immediately put them in non-orange bags. So they just looked like bags. You brought up a tremendous stack of receipts and they reimbursed you the equivalent amount in local currency—

Q: Did you do this by yourself, or did you and Susan do it together?

MCAULEY: No, I did it by myself.

Q: Okay, so you are like a courier service.

MCAULEY: That, of course, meant taking Air Moldova, which was always a little scary.

You probably heard, for many months, the only way you could get to a western country was they had an Air Moldova flight that transited Ivano-Frankivsk in the Ukraine and then went to Frankfurt. That was once a week on Saturday, and that was how we got our diplomatic pouch. So for many, many, many, many weeks, Saturday night was going out and collecting the diplomatic pouch.

Q: So some of this career stuff was part of your job?

MCAULEY: Yeah. If the plane was five hours late, I just waited five hours.

When the Peace Corps arrived for the first time, I met them. I made some really good friends from the Peace Corps people. I felt like I wanted them to know — I don't know what the relationship between the Peace Corps and embassy is like in a lot of places— but I thought it was really important that they show up. And so I was helping them hump

all of these heavy boxes, the stuff that they brought on the plane out to their car, and welcoming them and setting up appointments for them to talk to us, on the next day, Sunday. I still have friends that I made from that evening.

What else about Moldova? I got to do some interesting stuff, I also went out again by myself, you get funny connections there. One connection I got was with a guy who was with an oil company. I think he thought, incorrectly, that I would help him be able to get visas. One time, they took us out to Transnistria—which I'm sure you know by talking to Susan if not before—that was an area of great contention. He said he wanted to show me something, I said, "Great, show me something," so we went out. And we went to an area, it was actually a beautiful area, it was by the Dniester River. It was sort of a wooded area that had luxury dachas for the most important people in the governing party.

Q: And this was a few hours' drive, right?

MCAULEY: It was really only about ninety minutes or one hundred. It wasn't really that far—

Q: Okay, but they had dachas in Moldova? I hadn't thought about that.

MCAULEY: I mean, by American standards they were probably pretty modest, but they were nice. They were shaded and everything. But the thing was, they had all been shot to pieces during the fighting that had taken place before we arrived. They were left in that state. You could just see the bullet holes, hundreds of them. The entire front interior of a dacha was clearly shot to pieces and they didn't have the money to repair it right away. Probably that was the intent of the people who attacked it, to inconvenience people who were important enough. So that was a pretty incredible sight.

Q: So he brought you there to see what the damage had been? But was [Transnistria] where the oil was?

MCAULEY: As far as I know, they didn't have oil in Transnistria, what they had was the Russian 14th Army. Now, there was a part of Moldova which is on the other side of the Dniester River that was officially part of Moldova, but it was controlled by local separatist forces and the 14th Army. I actually never crossed over the river. Getting to the river and looking across the river at that moment was the farthest I got. I traveled all over the rest of the country, but I never went to Transnistria. Susan went to Transnistria to observe some really appalling show trials, which she may have told you about.

We went to some very interesting places, including Gagauzia. Gagauzs are a Turkish ethnic group, they speak a language that's related to Turkish but they converted to the Russian religion, which is Orthodox, so they were Orthodox Turks, and they spoke their own little language. At some time before we arrived, they were militating for their own separate republic, so we went down there to do election observing. We found that there were basically no indoor toilets at all. Even the translators at the embassy who were local,

weren't aware of the level of the lack of rudimentary infrastructure that they had down there.

We went down to Gagauzia, and we observed elections, maybe Susan told you, we observed things like they would give two ballots to a married couple, and [a] man would have one in his hand and [a] woman would have won in [her] hand, they would go into the same booth, the man would come out with both in his hand. We liked the Moldovans, and we thought their heart was in the right place. We said, "We really don't allow that in America." And they're panicked, jumping up and down, like, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, they don't allow that in America." (Of course I worked last year in Arlington on the pandemic election, and I saw a lot of people coming and delivering two absentee ballots at the same time. I thought of Moldova.) After observing elections in Gagauzia, we went home, and we saw on the TV news that the president of the country and his wife voted. When they emerged from the voting booth, the president had two ballots in his hand.

Q: Why were they emerging with the ballots? It's like an electronic thing or something?

MCAULEY: No, it was all on paper.

Q: So they go in and they fill them in?

MCAULEY: Yes, that's right.

Q: And then they come out and they put them in a box?

MCAULEY: Yes.

Well, it was funny because, again, the advantages of language training [were] that a lot of times a person would come out by themselves and they would go up to the box, and there was a lady who sat by the box, and she looked at them and said in Russian, "Skolka?" which means "How many?" which struck us as a funny question, because the answer should always be "one." But it wasn't. And the embarrassed election officials explained that some people didn't want to come and vote, so they just gave their identity card to somebody else, and their friend came and voted for them. The friend told them how to vote, it was fine. We just said, probably that wouldn't be allowed in the United States, though, but, okay, fine.

We traveled at a different time to another place, in northern Moldova, the so-called "capital of the gypsies", they called it. I think that it was named Soroca, and it was the place where the richest and most well-heeled gypsies lived, and they had incredibly flashy houses. It was funny.

We got to travel around a bunch like that, that was nice. One of the nice things about living in Moldova was that it wasn't very important, so we didn't have lots and lots of visitors coming.

Q: Right, for sure.

MCAULEY: So most of the things we did, we did ourselves. Then, I think during the three years I was there, we had a twenty-four hour visit by Secretary of State Albright, and then one week later, we had a twenty-four hour visit by five senators led by Patrick Leahy. I want to mention that because it's sort of interesting.

Q: Did you work on the visit?

MCAULEY: Yes, I did.

Q: So what do you do on the visits?

MCAULEY: The first year, and maybe even year and a half I was there, I was the only GSO [General Service Officer] consular officer. I think there was enough work for five GSOs, but they just had me, and I wasn't even full-time, by which I mean, I also did consular work. Before the senators came, the embassy staff had a meeting, like normal for these events. Everyone agreed that we believed in breaking gender stereotypes. One of the gender stereotypes in Embassy culture was that a woman officer always goes out with the CODEL's [Congressional Delegation's] wives. There were two GSOs, me and a first-tour officer who was a woman and was younger than me. We had two jobs to choose from: going out with the CODEL's wives or motor pool. I agreed to go out with the CODEL's wives. I let the other officer deal with the motor pool. That's ironic, of course, because motor pool is a terrible job. I lucked out. I felt like I had won the lottery.

Q: Where did you take them?

MCAULEY: There was a brand new house restaurant for lunch. The lady was running it out of her house as a completely legal new business, and she made delicious food. It was perfect for them because after lunch you moved into another room for tea and dessert where they sold Moldovan handicrafts. So this was perfect. I went with them and it was like, "Oh, a man is coming with us. Isn't that funny?" And so [we] sat around and talked, I translated, everybody got along really, really well. The wives saw the handicrafts on the way in and they thought it was so interesting. Asked me questions, I tried to answer them as much as I could.

Q: Do you remember what Senator Leahy's wife was like?

MCAULEY: She was lovely. I was just talking to Susan about this, I understand that Mrs. Leahy passed away a little while ago. She was incredibly important to us at that moment, because while we were having a nice lunch with delicious Moldovan red wine and handicrafts, the Senators were having big, long, boring meetings, which you've heard about from Susan. At the end of the day, Leahy, who still today is going strong as president pro tempore of the Senate, was feeling kind of cranky and he didn't want to go to the evening reception with the Moldovan officials. Everybody was like "Oh my God, they're just going to be so upset if they don't have the evening reception." He's like, "No,

I don't want to go." Mrs. Leahy lovingly took him by the lapels of his suit jacket in the hotel control room, and whispered sweet nothings about how disappointed they'd be. In the end, the Senators had a lovely time.

Q: Yeah, wonderful.

MCAULEY: The wives had a lovely meal and they actually complimented me on my translating, which made me feel good, of course.

Q: You were very prepared. You were doing really important work, and it was fun too. Certainly, it was probably the highlight of your time in Moldova.

MCAULEY: The funny thing was that I had a walkie talkie like everybody else, but the only thing I heard was the other junior officer swearing at members of the motor pool—

Q: Oh, no.

MCAULEY: —or yelling, like, "Get over to Government House right away!" I turned the walkie-talkie off and I picked up my glass of wine, and felt again that I was very, very lucky.

Q: Anything else on your time there?

MCAULEY: Let's see. So I was a consular officer, we opened up the visa section, and this is like consular stories, right? I had my first and last dead American. Which was quite a thing. One of the first things I did when I arrived was I ordered caskets.

Q: So this— handling the death of an American citizen abroad— is one of those things that you can't cut corners on, it's very prescribed what you have to do. Did you have to notify the family?

MCAULEY: No, his company handled that.

The consular briefing before we left to open the Embassy said order caskets first thing, and so I did, 'cause I follow directions well. When they arrived, the local employees were just freaked out, like, "Look, they have caskets!" They took a long time to get to Moldova. They only arrived about three weeks before the guy died. They had the international construction company Fluor Daniel renovating the embassy. Renovating the embassy was a whole enormous mess, a lot of bureaucratic infighting. The mess was still going on at the time of the death. There was one man, I'm just going to give his first name, Frank. He was a Fluor employee. He had been hanging around with a much younger local translator for a long time. He died of a heart attack, but there was no funny business and there wasn't any compromising circumstance. He's probably younger than I am now, but he seemed old at the time. He had not a great heart, and he was out there in this difficult place and probably was drinking too much, and he died.

Q: Okay.

MCAULEY: I dealt with that. That meant going to his apartment and cleaning up his stuff. It included a cache of pictures of prostitutes doing their business, which I decided to cut up and destroy without telling his family. All of his other stuff I boxed up.

Then there was going out to the Moldovan morgue. Now, again, Ambassador Pendleton was wonderful about this. One of the first things I said to her when she arrived was, "Let's go out and meet the guy who runs the morgue in case we ever have dead Americans." She was an admin officer, so she was completely on board for that. The guy who ran the morgue was just so happy that we were paying attention. He got a picture from the meeting, Mary autographed it. He just was getting respect, which he liked. So when I needed him, he was great.

But the morgue in Chininau was primitive. If I remember correctly, you need a special coffin to ship a body internationally and the coffin is lined with zinc, I think zinc is correct. Anyway, it's a metal-lined coffin with something that looks like wood outside of it. You put the person in the metal box, and then you weld it shut. The Moldovans didn't have any welders, but luckily, there were construction people working on the embassy, including welders. So I went to the guy who was the head of the Fluor Daniel's team and said, "We need welders to put Frank's body in the box," and he said, "I'll take care of it." And the guys brought their welding kit. They looked very, very grim, which as well they should, and they went up to the morgue, which smelled really bad. They wheeled him out into the parking lot, outside it was a summery evening. You could do that, and it didn't smell quite as bad.

The only problem was that we had asked the US Consular Officer who gave us the briefing before we left gave us bad advice. We asked, "What size coffin should we order?" He said, "Probably medium is good enough." Well, Frank was about six-two. So the coffin was too small for him. I remember [I] got out there and the chagrined mortician said to me in Romanian "Nu încape," which means "He doesn't fit." And I said "Trebuie sa încape," which means "He has to fit." So we put him diagonally and we pushed his head over, and meanwhile the welders are watching. We pushed it down, and the welders got there and welded it shut in record time, and then we shut it. We were able to leave it at the morgue and then move it out the next day.

Q: To put it on a plane?

MCAULEY: Fluor Daniel paid for it, so I don't know how they got this arranged. I didn't ask them any questions.

Q: A lot of countries, even in Latin America, which is a lot closer to the United States, don't have this tradition and they like to cremate the bodies and it's often a fight to get the remains returned.

MCAULEY: Yeah, that wasn't a problem. After the welding job at the morgue, I went back to the embassy. It was evening, so it was actually the middle of the workday in the US. I was able to get the name and telephone number of the funeral director. I called him in South Carolina, got him on the phone, and explained to him that this was the problem, that the coffin wasn't quite big enough and he was sort of crouched and his head was sort of pushed over, so make sure the family isn't there when you open it. His attitude was, we wouldn't do that anyway. So that was good. That's my dead American story. That's my only dead American story.

Q: I'm glad you only had one. I'm glad that he wasn't murdered.

MCAULEY: Aside from that, we had the normal consulate stuff in Moldova. We had people wanting to work in the U.S. on tourist visas. The minister of sports came and wanted us to send thirty people as part of the Moldovan swim team, only, like, five of them were swimmers. The rest of them were people getting a free ride. And I said, "No, I couldn't do that." The ambassador backed me up, that was good.

As Susan told you, we stayed for three years. Eventually we got a house, and it would be considered completely inadequate, but we wanted to move out of the government hotel. So we moved into this half-renovated house. We were completely comfortable with it; it was actually quite idyllic in many ways. We were able to entertain in our home and do stuff like show movies on VHS for people who didn't have that stuff. We ended up extending an extra year to three years. We made quite a bit of money, which ended up being the deposit on the house that I'm in now.

Q: In Virginia or Maryland?

MCAULEY: In Virginia, in Arlington. We were able to put down a \$40,000 deposit on a \$190,000 house. People thought the size of our down payment was pretty unusual. That was because we were in Moldova, and we got extra pay.

Q: Did other spouses have that same experience of being so involved in the embassy's work?

MCAULEY: No. Another spouse, of the head of an agency in Moldova, stayed out of everything, and she didn't look very happy, and she had a boy, and he didn't look very happy. I don't blame them. There was no school, there was no nothing. Some spouses stayed home. Without getting into a great deal of gossip, one of the problems I had with GSO was when I found a barely adequate house for somebody. The officer took the house, but she didn't like the house. She thought the house was not worthy of her, but she took it anyway. Eventually, that woman had an affair with another member of the embassy, who was married, and his wife was out of the country. All of which I really didn't care about, but because you're GSO, you go to the house, and you see— I should explain: the guy, he didn't want to have local employees and local workmen there with no American escort. Like okay, whatever.

So I go there and they're working in the bathroom, and there are feminine hygiene products, American feminine hygiene products, on the sink. You don't need to be a genius to figure this out. The thing that really fried my biscuit was, in a country team meeting soon after, the ambassador said to the woman in the house who was having an affair, "I tried to call you there, and nobody answered." And the woman said, "That's because the phone doesn't work."

Q: Oh, no!

MCAULEY: I was shocked because I knew. But my wife's in the room. Whenever my wife's in my presence I hold myself to a higher level of behavior. I just sat there like an idiot with my mouth open. Weeks later, the ambassador figured it out, actually somebody else narked them out.

Q: That's terrible. Weird stuff happens in small places sometimes. Small isolated places.

MCAULEY: The experience with the Moldovans was generally very positive. We hung out at the Soros Foundation a lot. A lot of our friends were there. People we kept in touch with after we left.

Q: Did the people that work there have a house?

MCAULEY: Yeah, they had a house.

Q: They were from outside, but they lived there?

MCAULEY: No, they were Moldovans.

It had been built as a house, but it was functioning as the headquarters of the Soros Foundation. A son of George Soros, I don't know if he has more than one, who the Romanians all referred to as "the little prince," came to visit. He was someone we entertained at our home.

Q: And they were doing a lot of charitable work?

MCAULEY: They did a ton of stuff, some charitable.

Q: Mostly good, right?

MCAULEY: I thought it was all good when I was there, which was only until 1995. We were optimistic; we thought things were going to work out okay. I was sad that Moldova didn't work out as well as we thought, but there was some optimism at the time.

Q: When you moved back did you get to bring some wine with you?

MCAULEY: Actually no, I don't think so. First of all, we knew we could buy Moldovan wine in the U.S. So yeah, we left with happy memories. My wife and I, not only Moldova, in many posts, have this thing where the last day, she cries, and usually by the last day, maybe this is a defense mechanism for me as a man, but usually by the last day, I'm ready to go. I'm looking forward to whatever's next. So no tears, [I]want to go. Want to be in the West.

Q: This was a two year tour and you had done three years. You had really had a full experience—

MCAULEY: Yeah, in 1995 we returned.

Q: —complete with secret police.

MCAULEY: In Moldova, they didn't really bother us too much. Allow me to have one more story, and then that will be the end of Moldova. This is moving back in time to when we first opened the embassy. When we first opened the embassy, as I believe I mentioned the previous time, almost everybody was a Romanian speaker. It was not a politically motivated move, just everybody who spoke Russian went to another post. Officers who spoke Romanian could live in Chisinau. What we didn't know, and what I discovered when I became GSO, was that I had to start learning Russian because anybody with a skill, like carpenter, electrician, or locksmith, they all were monolingual and Russian. So I learned Russian while I was there.

I spoke Romanian from the start. The embassy didn't have enough people who could translate from English into Romanian or Russian, so I got stuck with this Romanian-speaking driver as a translator. Sometimes if we met somebody who we had to deal with in Russian, he would just translate from Romanian to Russian. He just thought this was hilarious, that he was a translator from Romania to Russian for the American Embassy. One of the first weeks we were there, one of the Friday evenings, a guy who worked for the station locked his keys in his car. He had driven his personal car from Germany where he was stationed, and he had locked his keys in his car. He didn't speak any language that helped. So he came to me and said, "I left my keys in my car, I need a locksmith." So at this point, I had a little brain seizure and language failure. In the place where the word "locksmith" should be, instead I had the word for grapes. I turned to my Romanian-Russian translator, I said to him, in Romanian, "This guy has locked his keys in his car, and he needs some grapes right away." The guy looked at me and he said, "Grapes?" I said, "Yes, grapes, and it's five o'clock, we need to call somebody before all the grapes go home for the evening." He said, "Grapes go home for the evening?" I said "Yes! He can't get in his car, he needs some grapes!" So we went back and forth like this for like twenty-five minutes. Then I believe Susan came along, and she said, "What's going on?" And I say, "Oh god, this translator, he's useless. This guy has locked his keys in his car and he needs some grapes." Susan says to me in English, "Why do you need grapes?" And then the penny dropped. The two words are completely dissimilar. There is a long and not very interesting explanation about how I got them mixed up. So having

made that leap, I turned to him and apologized, and I said, "We need a locksmith." "Oh, a locksmith?" He laughed, I laughed, and everything turned out okay.

Q: Excellent.

MCAULEY: That was the last war story from Moldova.

We came home, and we didn't really know what was going to happen next. We never know what's going to happen next. I worked really hard in Moldova for three years and I was kind of hoping that I might get some consideration for a decent job. The State Department has generally done very well for us, but sometimes there are too many people who have done difficult jobs and not enough rewards. So at that time they were just basically like, yeah, we'll try to find a job for you. In the end, I worked for a total of ten months in the passport office, which was then at 18 St. Street, I believe, maybe 1111 17th Street.

Q: It's still there.

MCAULEY: Basically, I got an official car, I drove around Northwest D.C. delivering passports to embassies. It was a fairly low stress job; I didn't worry about it. I sort of felt like, gee, I should have gotten more consideration.

There was something that was sort of percolating in the back of my mind that sort of made it clear which direction I should go. As I told you, I took the Foreign Service exam several times, I didn't pass it. I felt bad at the time. It was clear that I wasn't going to have a Foreign Service career of my own. I was beginning to realize that it was probably all for the best, that I'd rather be with my wife than be a tandem couple, especially because we didn't have any children and so money was not an enormous consideration. Of course, everybody wants to have more money, but I didn't feel like I needed to have a lot of money. Susan was sort of pushing me like, you'd be a good teacher, why don't you retrain as a teacher?

Q: How did she get that idea?

MCAULEY: I don't know, I think —

Q: Just your general bent in life?

MCAULEY: Maybe it was the overwhelming force of my winning personality. I saw that the State Department wasn't going to lay down the red carpet and say thank you for doing such a great job, here, have another challenging job. So it was okay, I actually was able to work this low stress job. That was like ten months. That was the amount of time it took me to apply for graduate school in the D.C. area. Eventually, I ended up going to a master's program in education at George Mason, in Fairfax, Virginia.

Q: How long a program is that, one or two years?

MCAULEY: Two years. I got a Master's in Education from 1995 to 1997. Especially compared to now, it was tremendously cheap. I remember tuition was like \$2,000 a semester. Most of the classes were in the evening, because the overwhelming majority of people were working teachers. There was a minority of people like me, who were converting from government service, some of whom were older than me. I got into the program, and learned how to teach ESL, so I was a full-time grad student for two years. It was very pleasant. I bought a car, I would go out there at like two in the afternoon after lunch, and classes ran from five until nine thirty and I came home. Susan was working as a desk officer and she was very, very busy. Actually, now I see she was working in INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research], but she still was busy enough. She likes to stay late. This is completely different for me, wherever I work, at five o'clock I'm ready to leave. Coming in early I'm okay for, but at the end of the day I want to go home. But she likes to hang out. I understand the State Department culture is after hours, you talk to people, you get to know things, you gossip. So that worked out very, very nicely.

Q: Well, actually, what happens is that you work all day to get stuff to your bosses, and then they don't actually get to it, because they've been in meetings all day until five o'clock, and then all of a sudden, five, six o'clock, your bosses are ready to talk about whatever the urgent thing was you worked on all day. On ESL teaching, does it really take two years to learn how to do?

MCAULEY: Many people get a certificate in TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages]. To do that, you take a lot of classes, in many places, in Applied Linguistics, and you get a lot of theory about language acquisition. It often takes a year or less. I actually considered joining the program, but it was very, very theoretical. You read lots of Noam Chomsky, but not the political stuff. In my program, we took a couple of classes in theoretical linguistics. It was a different school, that's part of the School of Liberal Arts. I was in Education, but you took some theoretical linguistics as a distribution requirement. It's a fascinating topic. It appeals to the scholar in me, but the school I was in actually prepares you to receive teaching certification and be a teacher in Virginia, you get teaching certification in Virginia. So that's the two-year program—

Q: So it's much broader than teaching language.

MCAULEY: Right. You learn how to do stuff, like, for example, if you identify students who have learning disabilities, they may also be dyslexic as well. So how do you recognize people who might need to have extra help from specialists who deal with people who just have trouble reading in general. I met lots of nice people and started doing things like observations in school and stuff like that.

At the very end of 1997— my marriage to Susan is lovely, but one or two moments are more difficult than others— this was a difficult moment, because I did student teaching at a school here in Arlington. It's a rich area and probably was considered a pretty cushy assignment. But I had conflicts with the teacher was supposed to supervise with me, and I ended up quitting and not completing it, and that made me very upset. [It] actually caused

me to have a depressive episode. Eventually I had to get psychiatric help and I still, today, take antidepressant medication. This was a moment of conflict between us because I really wanted her to come home and support me on this, and she just couldn't, for reasons that we've just talked about. She had gone to the Human Rights Office by this time, which was a lot more high energy than INR. I dropped out, and I felt really, really, really, really bad about it. But I did some things, like I temped for a few months, and I took one or two classes at Mason to keep going. Eventually, I pulled it together, I started seeing a mental health professional.

Q: Anyway, were you able to get your degree?

MCAULEY: I got my degree, yes, but I still don't have certification to teach in Virginia. As it turned out, I actually taught for Fairfax County, adult education, four nights a week. Since you live in Fairfax County you may know that they decommission old schools and then those are sort of like ESL schools. There's one at Seven Corners, one in Pimmit Hills, one in Herndon. I did a lot of those. Actually, I started only doing evenings. Then they liked me, so I had afternoons also.

Q: Did you like teaching?

MCAULEY: I did. Sometimes I think my problem with the State Department and my problem with educational bureaucracy is the same. Sometimes I am not sufficiently able to work into a big, sort of impersonal organization, but I managed to find my way.

Q: This is working with adults, right?

MCAULEY: Yes.

Q: That's different than working with kids too, they're usually highly motivated, the adults.

MCAULEY: I felt bad, I wish that I could have finished off my teaching certification. Time passed, and it was time to go overseas again, and that was when we went to Laos.

Q: Well, Laos must've been fascinating for you.

MCAULEY: It was.

Q: Had you been to Asia before?

MCAULEY: Never, and never to the tropics before. And never outside of Europe, really.

I want to make a little speech now where I urge dependent spouses to take language. Whenever I have a chance to talk to spouses, I always do this. They always look at me like I'm crazy. I say, "I don't care. Put up your kids for adoption. I don't care, whatever it takes, take the classes." They offer you free language classes. I always thought the State

Department should do more about this, because even if your spouse only speaks the language well enough to go to the market, then instead of being a prisoner in the house, and being miserable and feeling hopeless, and being a burden on the officer, calling them up at work saying, "When are you coming home?", they can function for themselves.

Q: The year is 1999, now?

MCAULEY: We started language training in 1999 and we finished it in 2000. It was ten months.

Q: And how did you find studying Lao?

MCAULEY: Well, Lao is a tonal language with its own unique writing system. It was hard, but I thought it was cool. I enjoyed learning the writing system, that nerdy stuff sort of appealed to me. Tonal language was funny— I'm not very musical, my wife's more musical, but I had fewer problems with tones because I'm a pretty good mimic.

As you know, you go to the Foreign Service Institute, and one of the most important parts of language training is the teachers. Their personalities are usually representative of the country you're going to go to. At one point, when I was learning Romanian, we had [a] language training supervisor who told the students, "If you don't like your teacher's personality, remember there are one million people in the country who are going to be just like that." But I loved Laos, because the Lao are the chillest, nicest people in the world. If you work at the embassy it's a headache, because it's very hard to get the Lao to organize themselves and do a project, build a bridge, make a démarche, whatever it is. But they were really nice to have as teachers, it was interesting to see how they lived.

They [had] stacks and stacks and stacks of old newspapers from Laos in their offices, on top of which they had a camp stove where they made their traditional food, because they weren't eating the stinking slop that they made in the Foreign Service cafeteria. It was funny because the Lao teachers and the Thai teachers and the other teachers in the area would complain bitterly about each other to us, but they all sat down and ate meals together. Wherever they go, the Lao, and the Thai, and to a lesser extent the Vietnamese, they seem to make a family-like unit.

Q: And you're tall, right?

MCAULEY: Yes.

Q: And these people are pretty short?

MCAULEY: Actually, one of the teachers was an unusually tall and aristocratic Lao, and his wife was also a teacher there. The husband and the wife, as far as I can tell, had not spoken to each other in decades and disliked each other intensely. We were surprised at the time, but we found that this is actually an Asian thing. That is often the way marriages work there. They added another guy later, and it turned out he was like a

nephew of the last king of Laos, and he was an incredibly elegant little man. Very sweet, very nice.

Q: How interesting. So, I was smiling when you were talking about going to study a tonal language, because that seems like the kind of situation where you get to mix up grapes and locksmith all the time, right? Do you remember any of those funny kinds of things, where the words were very similar except for the tones?

MCAULEY: I don't have an immediately funny story. I'll ask my wife, my wife usually has a pretty good memory for me doing ridiculous things.

Q: Oh, I'm sure that you weren't the only one. And it was a small group, I would imagine, so you were probably studying together?

MCAULEY: Well, actually, it was like six or seven people, which was an enormous number of people learning Lao. And again, we had a pretty good relationship with everybody. As I told you before, the normal thing happened where Susan was identified as a very talented language learner and went to the smart person class, and I was in the other class. But we had a good time. I think I told you that the guy who was the relatively large, tall, Lao guy, liked me. I did things in class that I brought from my experience in teaching school. For example, I got magazines and I cut out pictures of things and I wrote the Lao word in their squiggly little script, and then I stuck them all over the walls.

You've been in language training, and you know what happens is, three, four people sit in a room, and person number one speaks for three minutes, person number two speaks for three minutes. Sometimes your attention wanders. So I used a technique that I had learned in graduate school, which is you stick things up on the wall, and that way instead of staring off into space at a blank wall, you're staring off into space with words and pictures that remind you of vocabulary in the target language.

Q: And the writing for this, does it have both consonants and vowels?

MCAULEY: Yeah, it's syllabic. So you write this syllable, and the syllable is initial consonant, mid vowel, and end consonant. There are special symbols if the syllable starts with a vowel, or if there's no consonant at the end you just leave it off. The writing system also shows tone. Writing is very important to me, I'm a visual learner. The Foreign Service Institute actually had a very, very good system that some guy made in, like, 1964, when people were learning to go there for the secret war. It was amazing, because it was made in 1964, but the whole thing resembled an enormous PowerPoint deck. It was all on cassettes, so you listened to cassettes. You started with frame one, and you ended up with frame 2500, or whatever it was. You added things one by one, they explained very clearly what the system was, it worked super well for me.

Q: Was it grammar and vocabulary, or just vocabulary?

MCAULEY: This particular thing I was telling you about was just the writing system.

Q: Okay, how do you use the writing system?

MCAULEY: The problem was that the teachers were all old royalists. And so they really didn't like the communists, and the language had changed, because the communists had been in power for twenty-five years at the time. So, for example, they refused to teach you the communist word for civil servant. Instead, they used the royalist word for civil servant, which translates into servant of the king. And when we got there, we realized that communists didn't like that so much. And this was an amazing thing. They refused to teach us the word for yes.

Q: Why?

MCAULEY: Because that was the communist way of saying yes, it was low class. And if you've been in some languages, maybe you know that the teachers have some weird ideas about how classy American diplomats are supposed to behave. When we got there, the first day I went to the local church, I went to the expatriate church, and while we were there, the staff who had worked under the previous incumbent, the previous DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], showed up and Susan interviewed them and hired them. And those people were using this word, "tchao," which means yes. They refused to teach us this, and then when we went back we said, "Why did you refuse to teach us the word for yes?" They denied that they refused to teach us.

Q: Oh, dastardly.

MCAULEY: And the Lao teachers said, "But people don't really say that anyway," it's like, "Yes they do, we lived there for four years!"

Q: That's so paradoxical to conventional wisdom, because usually in Asian cultures and some of the ones that I've lived in too, they say it's really hard to get people to say no. So that's funny.

MCAULEY: That was a problem too, generally speaking. What they taught us for yes, they taught us the equivalent of "That's right." So when you said it, you sounded normal. But imagine walking into a country, knowing the language reasonably well. But every time the word yes comes, you've never heard that word before. You're able to figure out from context what it means.

Q: And also it sounds like goodbye in Italian.

MCAULEY: Because we had served communist countries in Eastern Europe, and now a communist country in Asia, the teachers in both of those places were usually expatriate troublemakers who didn't like the communist government and so therefore, there were certain things in common with the way they act, in spite of the fact that they were Europeans and Asians and also different.

Q: Had you lined up a teaching job in Laos?

MCAULEY: No, but the first Sunday in Laos, while my wife was interviewing the staff for the house, I went to the expatriate church, and by the time coffee hour was over I had an appointment for a job interview where I eventually worked.

Q: Doing what?

MCAULEY: Teaching English.

Q: Oh, at the church?

MCAULEY: Well, it was called the Anglican Relief and Development Agency, or ARDA.

Q: I see.

MCAULEY: And it was run by the Office of the Anglican Archbishop of Singapore.

Q: Okay.

MCAULEY: A lot of the people who worked there were people who really wanted to be missionaries. When they were not teaching, they were missionaries. The slang term that they used was tent making, because in the New Testament, Paul and some other people, they went around and that's what they did, they made tents. They set up as tentmakers and they preached the gospel and made tents to sell. I go to church, I like to go to church, but I'm the world's worst salesman. So I didn't do any proselytizing, it's beyond me. It was actually good because I had got a Master's Degree in education, I knew more about education, so I actually filled in and I told people, why don't we do this, why don't we do that? For example, I redesigned the intake test for the school. When I worked for Fairfax County, I learned how to use the intake tests. And frankly I stole some of the materials. Then I brought it and I said, "This is the intake test that we had to determine their speaking ability." And before that, it was just a teacher talking to someone for two minutes and said, "Yeah, I think he's this level," but instead, I had a thing where you asked them questions and you rated their answers zero, one, or two, and at the end, you added them up. The students also took a written test, you compared them and you split the difference, or sometimes they matched up.

Generally speaking, semesters were five weeks and then a week break, and then five weeks and then two weeks off, or a week and a half off, and five weeks again. So there were breaks every once in a while, and so my wife and I could occasionally find, like this is the time where I have off, let's go to Bangkok or let's go to wherever we want to go to. So we were able to have teaching, and the pay was very, very small, I made like 500 dollars a month.

Q: I think that's better than a lot of places.

MCAULEY: Right, so it was fine.

Q: And you were teaching adults or children?

MCAULEY: Basically, over sixteen. It went all the way from kids who were sixteen all the way up to, I think my oldest student was like seventy. And occasionally, people who were not Lao came in, like a Thai businessman, I had a Korean guy, people from the international community, especially people who didn't have a lot of money came. Mostly it was Lao people. The Archdiocese actually gave some money, and we started having a scholarship program.

We learned things that I think people who are in foreign aid already know. For example, if you give people something for free, they don't value it, but if you make them pay ten dollars, they value it. So classes normally cost like seventy dollars. But when we got these scholarships, we made them pay the equivalent of ten dollars. This was a lot of money for some of them. So when we made them pay ten dollars, they showed up. It was funny, because the diocese says, "We want poor people to get this." And we talked about, how do we reach the poor? And I said, many poor people drive a motorized tricycle for a living. It has three wheels, they're very popular in Laos and Thailand. And most of these guys are very poor, they're taxi driver equivalents. So when I took those, because Susan had the car, I talked to these guys, and I said, "Here, you want to learn English, it costs \$10." Some of them came themselves, but a lot of them had a member of their family, their daughter or their niece or somebody, and they're 16 years old. Older people said, she's the future, she needs this. So that's how we reached out to the poor a little bit.

Q: Was it like Good Morning, Vietnam where you did funny things to get your students engaged?

MCAULEY: I started off with the higher level classes, and my Lao was pretty good. I also had a Lao teacher at the embassy. Eventually, I taught the beginners, they were lovely. We had some really, really interesting characters. A lot of them were from the small Christian community. They were lovely people. But there were also people who just worked for the government, or things like that.

There was a very smart American teacher who was researching one of those tiny minority groups that live in the mountains. They're isolated and they have their own language. She was documenting the language and creating a Bible in their language. That stuff is so cool. I wanted to do some of that myself, but it involved too much squatting in the dirt. Among the other teachers, there were lots of people from Australia and New Zealand. The management was from Singapore. Singaporeans, ethnic Chinese, spoke English perfectly, of course.

Q: So you had your own circle.

MCAULEY: Same place on Sunday, we went to the expatriate church. Expatriate church in the morning was more laid back and kind of liberal and more liturgy-based, and then the evening where the Baptists and the hands in the air and the shouting and stuff like that. We didn't go to that so much. We lived in a lovely house, but we had lots of funny things happen to it. You may be hearing some of this for the second time, I apologize.

Q: I don't think so.

MCAULEY: Within a year we had a fire, a massive infestation of wood eating bugs, and a burglary.

Q: A burglary?

MCAULEY: Yeah. That led up to the staff shyly coming to Susan and saying, "We think your house is infested by bad spirits and you need an exorcism in the house."

Q: Okay. Did she do it?

MCAULEY: Yes, of course we did it. What did we come all this way for, right?

Q: So what's an exorcism like in Laos?

MCAULEY: An exorcism, a Buddhist exorcism? First of all, it's the nicest, funnest exorcism you ever want to go to. The local staff suggested this, and we let them go and organize it. Susan was the primary point of contact. They would come to Susan asking for more money every so often. In the end, it was a huge party.

Before we get to the party, I want to talk about the fact that you learn, or I've learned anyway, to be more generous toward your fellow man as you grow older. And one instance of this was in the matter of the guy who worked as the gardener at the house. So it's a tropical place and things grow like mad, and it's hot. The gardener was named Mr. To. We paid him personally, he wasn't on the embassy salary, if I remember correctly. But Lao are extremely mellow, and so most of the time when we were coming and going, he'd be standing in the shade, using the watering hose. And he'd just be staring off into space, watering things like this. I was sort of a grumpy New Yorker and I said, "God dammit, we could just get a sprinkler to replace that guy." And my wife said, "Oh, don't be like that, dear, just leave it alone." It's like, okay, yeah, that's fine. He was very nice, he stayed out of my way, stayed out of his way. Well, one day, he saved the house from burning down.

Q: Yay.

MCAULEY: Right. Susan was traveling upcountry Laos for business, I was teaching, and a fire broke out. The way a fire broke out was that we had those American cookers, an electric cooker. And it has a clock which doesn't work, because the electrical cycles per minute in Laos are not the same as the US. Enormous, great, really scary red ants love to

eat the plastic casing of those electrical wires. And they did. And two wires touched and caused a fire. Everybody was away. But Mr. To was there sprinkling, and he saw smoke pouring out of the kitchen windows.

As I told you, I thought, this guy's an idiot. I was wrong. First thing he did was he ran off and he shut off the electricity at the source for the house. He had his hose, so he broke the window and he turned the hose on the kitchen. And then he went to a neighbor's house and he called the guys from the embassy who he knew, because they were all in the embassy soccer team together. They came out, and he called the house staff who had gone home for the day. The house staff came out and they did things like they rescued the cat who was terrified. The General Services Officer called me in the middle of class, and they said, "You had a fire in your house." I said, "I can't do anything about it now. I have another three hours of teaching." I didn't go home, I just taught my classes. Matter of fact, I didn't even think about it. I thought this can't be anything very important. You know, they said, "You had a fire in your house, but it's all out now. Everything's okay."

Q: They didn't really make clear how big a deal it was.

MCAULEY: Yes, it was fine. I came home, and there turned out to be a certain amount of damage, smoke damage. We had to move out of the house for a little bit while they repainted and stuff. The embassy had to do a report about this, and the bureaucracy in Washington in the Foreign Buildings Office, as they called it back then, had to write a report. Of course, no one traveled all the way to Laos to investigate.

They didn't come there, they didn't do any investigation, but they concluded it was the fault of the house staff. Luckily, there was no follow-through, there was no punishment. Still, that really cheesed me off and I said to my wife, "God dammit, I'm gonna write them." And she said, "Just calm down." She understood somebody in Washington had to write a report, and then it would be filed away and that would be the end of it.

After we had the fire, we were sitting at home one quiet night in Laos. And we're sitting there and we're like, what's that noise, it's like crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch. Susan, she has better hearing than I do, she goes— we have lovely wood paneling in the house—she pushes on the wood paneling and it all crumbles under the pressure of one finger, and there are a lot of little ants running around the other side. There were a lot of them. Our ginger cat ran up and looked in and wanted to eat the ants. We moved back to the same house that we had moved back to the first time, and they fumigated and repaneled the whole house.

And then the burglary. The embassy had an overnight guard at our house who had an eight-hour shift from nine until five am, and then Mr. To the gardener came at seven am. Well, apparently, somebody had been casing the house, because between five and seven am they broke in, actually while we were asleep, but we had the air conditioner on, white noise, and the door closed. I woke up first and it was clear somebody had broken into the house. The only alarming thing was that the burglars had left the door open and our cat, who'd we brought from the United States, actually had gotten out. But he had gotten

about ten feet, and everything was so exciting and new, he was just sat there on a tree stump, transfixed. I was able to grab him and bring him back in. The burglars stole a few things, including some of my wife's earrings. Of course, I teased my wife because I believe my wife has too many earrings. She does not agree with my opinion. But earrings were the most valuable things that were stolen. We didn't have a lot of stuff to steal. Of course, there had to be an investigation, and the admin officer had to come. We didn't have an RSO [Regional Security Officer], at the time, RSO came like a week later. Eventually they caught the people who did it, but of course we never got anything back. I don't think we lost anything of value, except perhaps the feeling that we were invulnerable. After those three things happened, it was clear to the house staff that evil spirits needed to have a house cleansing, also known as an exorcism.

Q: Okay. Was there like a little shaman person that came?

MCAULEY: The house staff said, "Let us handle it." And actually, the person who ended up leading the service was the equivalent of the Pope of Lao Buddhism. It's an autonomous church, national church, and the guy who is the head of the Buddhist church in Laos, who of course has his headquarters in the capital, she snagged him.

Q: Was he dressed up very picturesquely?

MCAULEY: Well, Buddhist monks dress up all the same, in orange robes. The whole idea about Buddhism is that they're all very humble. The patriarch of the Lao Buddhist church is older than the rest of them, but he has the same shaved head and shaved eyebrows and orange robes. He came with six other monks. (Odd numbers are good luck, even numbers are bad luck.) They did the whole service. We sat there. There was a certain amount of trust involved about this crazy stuff we were doing. Nobody told us what was going to happen. We just trusted it was going to be okay. For example, at some point, the staff measured around our skulls. I asked, Why are you measuring the circumference of our skulls? "For the candles." "What do you do with the candles?" "Well, first we twist them all together like this. Then, we put them on your head and then we light them." I was alarmed at first. What they didn't explain to us was that they put them on their heads during the ceremony and then they take them off our heads, and then they light them. So that was okay.

Q: Did you have the ambassador or the admin counselor or somebody, or the PAO [Public Affairs Officer], who just couldn't miss this thing? Or was it just you and Susan?

MCAULEY: We had several people from the embassy attend, but the ambassador didn't come. I don't know if he was invited. We actually want to keep this sort of on the QT a little bit. Some people in the expatriate community who had gone completely native said, this is wonderful, you are culturally sensitive, this should be in the Washington Post. And it took place on Thanksgiving Day. I could just see right wing people getting this headline, "American diplomats host exorcism on Thanksgiving Day." That would be a great headline for them. So few of the Americans came, but almost all of the local employees came.

Q: I'm sorry I'm laughing, but it just sounds so delightful.

MCAULEY: It was wonderful. There was a typical Lao cultural divide, meaning, the women were more serious about participating in the ceremony itself, but the men hung out outside and smoked cigarettes and waited for the banquet. That was fine with me. But we sat there, we listened, we practiced our Lao listening comprehension. The head of the Lao Buddhist church did a sermon, so we listened to the sermon. Part way into it, I leaned over to my wife, and I said, "Did he just say Buddhism is like a coconut?" And she said, "Yeah, that's what I'm getting too." As it turns out, it wasn't a completely crazy thing to say. Because a coconut, the patriarch explained, it doesn't look like something great on the outside, but the really good stuff is on the inside.

After a while, we did the thing where they wrapped the candles around our heads and removed them. We sat there for a while longer, and they sprinkled us with water. And they did all that stuff, then the monks bless this water, and then you have to keep the water and bathe yourself with it in order to placate the spirits, which, okay, I did it, I bathed myself with water that had been blessed by monks. In for a penny, in for a pound, right?

Then immediately after that we did another traditional Lao ceremony which we did many, many times, before and after, not just as part of exorcisms. This is a ceremony that they have called a *Baci*. The ceremony is centered around a thing that looks a little like a tiny Christmas tree with string on it, and they take the string off and they tie it around your wrist saying prayers, and then you're supposed to keep it on your wrists, you're supposed to shower with it, supposed to do everything until they fall off by themselves.

Q: Was there traditional Thanksgiving food?

MCAULEY: No, completely Lao food. That evening, I went off and I taught from five to nine in the evening, just like usual. My wife went off to the ambassador's house and had traditional Thanksgiving dinner with the ambassador and the other embassy staff, which I was actually okay with missing.

All the Lao people had a great time. The ladies who ran the house and their friends came in the night before and they just stayed up all night. They took little naps outside, just preparing the food, because there just had to be a mountain of food.

I almost wrecked the ceremony. Because, to point back to an earlier detail I mentioned, odd numbers of Buddhist monks are lucky and even numbers of Buddhist monks are unlucky. You only have an even number of Buddhist monks at funerals. I didn't know that. I had an excellent student who is still a friend of mine, and now lives in California as a Buddhist monk. He's just a lovely, lovely man. And I invited him. And this created, of course, a tremendous problem. Eventually, what happened was Susan gave her cell phone to the local translator, she called him and explained the whole thing. When the ceremony was over, we sent one of the local drivers in our car down to pick him up. Then he was

able to come back and have some of the food. He wasn't participating in the ceremony, thus transmitting bad luck.

Q: Oh, excellent. Very, very good. And I take it that it was successful, and there were no further disasters?

MCAULEY: No fires, no further burglaries, no further infestations of giant red ants.

Q: How wonderful.

MCAULEY: It's very interesting about their animist beliefs. Actually this has come back to the United States in the form of Marie Kondo a little bit. I don't know how you're acquainted with Marie Kondo?

Q: The objects should bring you joy, right?

MCAULEY: Yeah. Marie Kondo says, when you throw out a shirt, you pick up the shirt and you say, "Thank you, shirt, you've been a great shirt. I really enjoyed you. I'm sorry, I don't need you anymore." So everything has a spirit, including trees. So when you're in that area, and you have to cut down trees, you ask the spirit of the tree, "Please don't be angry. I have to have a house." And the other trees that are left there, you have to say, "Don't mind that all of these humans are here. We will leave you alone." Apparently, there was this one big venerable tree in the backyard whose spirit had to be especially placated. So various objects from the ceremony went out and were placed in auspicious positions around the tree. And we saw them kneeling in front of it and whispering to each other, maybe whispering to the tree afterwards, but we left that alone. We felt they didn't need our help.

Q: Very good. So you were there for three years, and when you needed some sophistication you would go to Bangkok, or medical care?

MCAULEY: Yeah, we went to Bangkok often. We flew down there for some weekends, we saw big movies in air-conditioned theaters with recliners and stuff. We liked going down there, but we also liked coming back.

In Laos, I read War and Peace, because even though the internet had started, it had not really reached Laos. I had a word processor, and I could write paper letters to people more easily, but the internet really didn't work so well. Sometimes I wrote emails, and I was able to come into the embassy and copy an email into Outlook and send it away. But the rest of the world was getting up to speed on using the internet all the time, but we were behind that.

The other thing that happened was we were there when 9/11 happened. I was actually flying to New York City at the time. Susan was in Laos, because I was coming back from my yearly visit to my parents, who were getting on in years.

Q: And so you landed at Kennedy, or were you able—?

MCAULEY: I was on a flight from Tokyo. We suddenly landed in Vancouver. I was part of the enormous number of people who were stranded in Vancouver. Now, luckily, I have cousins who live in Seattle. The airline offered to give us a bus ride to Seattle. So I took it. I went to Seattle, and first stayed in a crummy hotel, then my cousins— and you remember, at that time, everybody was looking for somebody to help or something to do that would make them feel like they were making the world a better place. So my cousins were thrilled that I was there. And also, I hadn't seen them for like twenty years. So that was the first time I'd actually seen Seattle. So I spent a couple of days there because it was impossible to go anywhere. I remember, there was beautiful weather the whole week in Seattle. I had a good time, despite the fact that it was a very sad moment for the country.

Eventually, after a couple of days, I was able to get a flight to DC via Minneapolis. You could tell all the people who worked in aviation just had big rings around their eyes, and people were very tense. We have a very close friend who lived here in DC. At the time, she was pregnant with a child who is now going to university. I called her and I said, "I'm coming to the airport, I'll have dinner with you, come to my hotel." And she said, "Don't be ridiculous. I'm picking you up at the airport, you're staying at my house." And she did, and that was nice. Like I said, she was pregnant with her child, and her husband who was with USAID was stuck in South America somewhere. Our friend, like my cousins, felt happy to be able to help someone. Then I took the train to New York City. I was able to see from the train, you could see the big, smoldering heap that was the World Trade Center. That was about seven days after 9/11.

Q: How were your parents doing, were they frantic?

MCAULEY: When we landed in Vancouver, they released us all into the baggage claim area, where we were held for a few hours. There were payphones there, and I made a very expensive reverse charge call to my father saying, "I'm on the ground in Vancouver. I don't know what's happening, but I'm safe. I'm fine. I'm in Vancouver, Canada, what could be safer?" Actually, they're the ones who got in touch with my cousins in Seattle. Then I was with my cousins, and they were communicating with my cousins, and my parents were happy. They knew where I was at every step.

Ten days later, and by the time I had gone across the country, I'd managed to lose my baggage check. Eventually I went back to Kennedy Airport, and there was this enormous area that looked sort of like the end of Raiders of the Lost Ark with just a sea of suitcases. And I just went up and down until I found my suitcase. So that's my 9/11 story.

On 9/11 itself, when I was able to get to a phone, I was actually able to use one of those long distance credit cards that AT&T used to have to call my wife at the American Embassy in Laos and tell her that I was okay.

Q: But that was a couple of days?

MCAULEY: No, no, that was actually the next morning, our time about. So anyway, she—

Q: She didn't know you—

MCAULEY: No, but she had figured out that I had just about crossed the Pacific, and I was nowhere near New York. So she had figured out that everything was okay. But that's how I contacted her.

So Laos. Laos was very pleasant, it was sort of a real surprise. Before that, we had been in the Balkans. Susan might have told you, she said, Asia had a future and the Balkans only had a past. Laos, it was very, very poor and very discouraging in some ways, but there were lots of young people and you felt like the world was going to be okay, somehow.

Q: Well, that's good.

MCAULEY: So the next is going to be Bangkok.

Q: We'll maybe do that next time. Let me stop recording. Thank you. That was fascinating.

Q: Good afternoon. It's March 29, 2021, and we're continuing our oral history conversation with David McAuley. So, David, we left you in Laos, and what were the years that you were there?

MCAULEY: It was 2000 to 2004, summer of 2000 to summer of 2004.

Q: Okay. I know that even though it was some years after the Vietnam war, people were still coming to Laos and other parts of Southeast Asia to look for the remains of POWs and those Missing in Action (MIA). I was wondering if you had any contact with these people?

MCAULEY: Vientiane was a small embassy, and so MIA was an enormous part of the embassy. I don't think quite 50 percent, but maybe 40 percent of the embassy was dedicated to this project. There were military people and civilians as well. And, of course, they were part of the community. I don't think I had a really, really strong relationship with any individual person. They were out of the capital a lot. They spent most of their time digging in the dirt in the country, and I respect that completely.

The one memory is, at one point, the POW/MIA team recovered the remains of the brother of then-Vermont governor and one-time presidential candidate, Howard Dean. His brother was something of a hippie, and died very young. He was something of a hippie and there was the so-called "Secret War" going on in Laos at that time. The brother got killed there. Actually, it's not clear to me what happened, I haven't researched it. It's not clear to me if it was murder or misadventure or accident. All I know is that they did find the remains. They identified the remains from some things that he had with him.

I guess I should make clear that, when I met Dean, the POW/MIA unit had not yet found the body of his brother – that happened fairly shortly after he visited. At that time, Dean (I believe it was the first time) was seriously considering running for president. And so, this was something that, if I understand correctly, he felt he had to go out there in person, and sort of close the circle. Dean was actually a pretty big deal at the time. Of course, he flamed out over something that I thought was pretty silly later on. I still see him on TV, I consider Dean fairly charismatic and well-spoken. He could have made at least as good a president as some other people who became president since then. Dean came to Laos and Susan and I took him and the two very tall Vermont State Troopers that he brought with him as his bodyguards out. We had dinner with him at the outdoor fried rice place, in the heat, plastic chairs and Formica tables, outside around the corner from the embassy. I was really positively impressed with him.

Q: This is more than twenty years after his brother would have died?

MCAULEY: His brother, I believe, died in the 1970s. I mean his brother was like, twenty-five years old, and Dean was probably also in his twenties when his brother was killed.

Q: So that must have been very emotional to hear from somebody directly involved but prominent, and also perhaps he had been prominent in the movement to get this going.

MCAULEY: Dean was very normal. He didn't want to go to the hotel restaurant or a place for foreigners. He really wanted to go down and eat fried rice out in the sticky heat. His state troopers were also quite personable, as well. We talked about Laos for a long time with him.

One thing that we sort of ironically liked about Laos was: this was the time of the Second Gulf War. I will just burden you with my opinion, I believe it was not our proudest moment as a country. But the Lao, their whole culture is based on ignoring inconvenient facts. And also, frankly, they just weren't interested in world politics so much, so I didn't have to worry about explaining our foreign policy mistakes so much.

I have a very strong memory from Laos. This was one of the last times I had a life before you could use the internet all the time. At that time, you could use the internet all the time in the West, but in Laos, internet infrastructure had not come up yet, so I still listened to shortwave radio. I listened to Voice of America and their coverage of the Gulf War. It was so completely slanted, it reminded me of the Soviet Union English-language radio broadcasts that I had heard. That really disappointed me about the U.S.

Q: So it wasn't so much the invasion of Afghanistan, but going into Iraq on the basis that we did, that was the thing that was causing diplomats around the world a lot of trouble in defending.

MCAULEY: Yeah, the whole nonexistent, alleged weapons of mass destruction. But if any place in the world was completely untouched by this, it was Laos.

So, from there we went to Thailand and sort of transitioning—

Q: Susan said that you convinced her to bid highly on Thailand, that you were ready for something a little more in touch with the world. More cosmopolitan.

MCAULEY: That's exactly right. I mean, Susan never wanted to go anywhere with more than ten American officers.

First of all, Lao and Thai are essentially the same language, in my opinion.

Q: I didn't know that.

MCAULEY: Lao is Thai with a hick-from-the-sticks accent. A large number of the people who live in the northeast of Thailand are actually ethnic Lao, and they speak Lao. And they're sort of the permanent underclass.

While we were living in Laos, we went to Bangkok regularly just for three day weekends, so we knew it pretty well. Sometimes we would go to get a medical checkup or just to go see the latest Hollywood blockbuster. We found, somewhat to our amusement, that we could get by perfectly fine with speaking Lao, especially because taxi drivers and maids at the hotel were mostly ethnic Lao people. If you look like me, or even look like my wife, and you speak Lao, you are the funniest thing an ethnic Lao taxi driver in Bangkok has seen all day. Thai people could often recognize what we were trying to say in Lao. And again, I'm a tall guy and I'm clearly Western. Then, I'm coming around and I'm

speaking this sort of hillbilly Thai. Thai people would gesture for their friends to come and they would say, "Hey, come over, listen to this guy."

We knew that we would get full Thai language training but it would be very easy. I made it even easier for myself by ordering one or two textbooks while still in Laos and starting to get a hang of the Thai alphabet. Lao and Thai have an alphabet which are related to each other but are not Latin based.

I'm sure you know, in the Foreign Service, you are always entitled to home leave, but there's always some reason why you can't take it. This was one time where we got to take all of the home leave we were entitled to, because we just told them we were starting Thai one month later. It turns out, there was a third person who had been in Thailand a long time before and was also coming but didn't need the full course. The three of us made a group. And the school could say, okay, this group is starting one month later. So, as a result, we were able to do something that was really fun, which was we had a sublet in Manhattan, in the West Village, and we stayed there for four weeks. It took me about four weeks to change from a day person that I usually am to a night haunting Manhattanite, and by that time we were just about ready to leave. We went to a lot of clubs and restaurants and things like that. It was super.

Q: My son is in the East Village right now. He's twenty-four. Tiny amount of space but he's enjoying it.

MCAULEY: Yeah, the East Village is not the incredibly rough neighborhood that it once was, but it's not the fanciest neighborhood in New York City. Normal people can still afford to live in miniscule apartments. Our sublet was over by, I don't know if you know, Abingdon Square and White Horse Tavern, where Dylan Thomas drank himself to death. It was wonderful, and we really, really, really enjoyed it. Went to the opera and went to movies outside. We had a lease that started September 1 and went to September 30. And then on September 30, we went straight to DC. While in Manhattan, I went and saw my parents. Wednesday was going-to-see-my-parents day, and so we took the Long Island Railroad out and we had lunch and then came home.

We went on to Thai language training. Like I've told you before, every language training I enjoy. When I've been invited once or twice to talk to people at FSI, I always tell the spouses, do whatever you have to do to take the language training. You meet people at the Foreign Service Institute who you eventually interact with at post. Later on, when you are actually at the embassy, if you need to talk to the RSO, for example, instead of just being a face, you're a person that they know every day.

The Thai language teachers were more sophisticated than the Lao, and a bigger community. They had a funny thing, I think I mentioned this to you before, where they always form a family. So even though the Thai teachers talked smack about each other in class, they always sat down together and had lunch.

Q: Oh, right.

MCAULEY: Which I guess is sort of like a real family. They remark, observing us Americans, what we did was eat a sandwich for five minutes, and then for fifty-five minutes rush around and go to the ATM or answer emails or whatever it is that people have to do. But there was no rushing lunch for Thai people. The Thai language course was unlike the others we had learned — we had learned Romanian and Lao, and they were very, very obscure little languages. You'd think this was a more important country and the staff would be more professional but still, the materials were really outdated. And the teachers, I love them, they were lovely, lovely, lovely people, but it was the year 2005 and we were using materials that they had prepared for the 1988 presidential election and not updated.

Q: Okay.

MCAULEY: But Susan and I and the third guy who was there, we all got along really well. The Thai were fun, as I believe I told you, I feel that that was the post I enjoyed the most. And the language training was very nice, too.

Q: You were planning on teaching there?

MCAULEY: Yes, I was planning on teaching there, and I did. I got a job in a completely normal way. By that time, there were websites where you got jobs instead of newspapers. There were websites for people looking for English teacher jobs, and I applied for a job, it was like the second job I applied for, and I got that job.

Q: Was this for adults or children? Were you still teaching English as a foreign language?

MCAULEY: I'm teaching English as a foreign language. For three years, I taught English to nurses. This was a school of nursing named after the late mother of the guy who was the king of Thailand at the time. She had studied nursing in Harvard University, where her husband, the future king, had also studied.

The king's American birth was something that for some reason rubbed the Thai the wrong way, if you mentioned it. The sainted king of Thailand, who was getting pretty old by the time we got there, actually was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts near Harvard Square at Mount Auburn Hospital, because his parents were Harvard students, both of them. So anyway, the mother was sort of the patron saint of the nursing school, and the nursing school was very interesting.

In addition to providing nurses, which is something every society needs, this was also sort of a bit of social engineering. It was a way of picking off especially young ladies who were from the village and whose parents were farmers, if they were sort of brighter than average and more studious than average. The number of young girls you needed on rice farms in northeast Thailand was shrinking, and the number of nurses you needed was growing. A lot of these women came from rural areas of Thailand, and they were ethnic Lao. Of course, I spoke some Lao, and that was all hilarious for them. They came to the big, big city to study nursing and then they would go home to their village, most of them, and be nurses there. I felt it was a really worthwhile use of my time.

The pay was okay. I got paid in Thai baht and I remember declaring about \$10,000 or \$11,000 a year on my income tax. My wife's salary was fully taxable but my salary was exempt from taxation, but I had to declare it. I had to pay Thai taxes, and this was actually something that occasionally we thought about—you know, I'm not supposed to be paying taxes, because I'm a diplomat. But my permission to work legally was something of a gray area, but I think because everybody at the school decided that I was, if I may say so, a good English teacher and they were happy with me and stuff like that, that they just wouldn't ask too many questions about my legal status. I never had to actually fill out a tax return, I just got my money and said thank you. And I think they were sending taxes on my salary to the Thai government. As you know, most everywhere in the world outside of America, these laws are a little easier to fudge and there's always a gray area.

Q: But this was legit from a US IRS perspective. The reason that Americans who spent more than 350 days overseas, or whatever it is, don't pay taxes at home is because they're probably going to be paying taxes overseas. You did good.

MCAULEY: Right, so I didn't push on the “no taxes” question. I had a lovely, lovely time in Thailand, it was probably the best teaching gig I ever had. The Thai were really nice. It was a very easy commute, which was sort of unusual for Thailand because the automobile traffic was apocalyptic. The job happened to be located really smack next to a Bangkok Skytrain stop. The Skytrain is the elevated railroad, as we would call it in New York City. The school was right next to the sky train stop, and I lived about ten minutes'

walk from the other end of my commute. I didn't have any problem getting to work. The Skytrain was clean and air-conditioned to Arctic levels.

Q: Were you teaching English to nurses so they could better understand the textbooks and things like that?

MCAULEY: Well, actually, it was things like medicine labels. Until the students got to the third or fourth year, I didn't do a lot of specialized English. Basically, I had a general textbook and mostly they learned general English. Just like a lot of other places I ended up working, there was no curriculum and no assigned textbook, the school management just said, "Teach them something." I said okay, and I picked up the textbook that I used at my school in Laos, and I said, "Let's use this one." This was a popular textbook series that everybody knew about and so they said, "Yeah, that's great." And I tried to integrate some stuff about nursing.

Like the Japanese students who I teach now online, partly a cultural thing, I believe, is that even though the Thai got compulsory English language classes from age twelve, their English skills were terrible. A lot of that, I believe, was that their teachers who taught English were bad. A lot of them could not actually speak English. Myself, I had moments where I had a chance to talk to alleged English teachers, and they really could not carry on a normal conversation. Even "Hello, how are you?" in English.

The level of English ability of the students varied widely, but everybody took the same class. The class was between 100 and 110 students. Once a week, we would have a lecture period and then there would be like four smaller classes. These were twice a week for more conventional classes of twenty-five students. I did writing assignments during the lecture class. The students all sat there and did some writing, and then I had 110 papers to grade.

Before I taught at the nursing school, I also did some volunteer teaching. There was a website where you could sign up to visit a school for volunteer opportunities. This was before I started full-time. The web site would give you the address, and if you got in contact with the school, they would send you bus fare. You go up to the school and they would put you up somewhere very simple for a weekend. It was sort of a weekend English camp. I did that a couple of times and that's where I got to know a little bit about the inadequate English teaching. It was interesting, especially because in spite of the fact that many of my nursing school students had passed English since seventh grade (so that would make it five or six years), there was always one or two percent of the students who [were] actually completely illiterate, that is could not read or write in the Latin alphabet. I broke those students out into a special class, because the most important thing that the

school administration wanted was that they didn't want anybody to fail. Which actually I had sympathy with. The students who were actually illiterate in the Latin alphabet. They were a little ashamed, you know it's an Asian shame culture thing. But I actually got to them and managed to help a lot of them. I had one student in particular who was a project. She was completely illiterate, and just terrified of me and ashamed. But I worked with her very hard one-on-one.

One of the good things about the school was that I worked until four o'clock only. Susan was political counselor at that time, so she worked late all the time, waiting until Washington called. I knew by this time that Susan wasn't going to be home early. So, I actually took aerobics classes with the other teachers after work. I was the only Westerner and often the only man. I just went and I did aerobics with the Thai ladies every day, and they thought it was funny. And then after being funny for a while, it was just, "You again, oh, here you are."

So, I had people who could not read the Latin alphabet. After aerobics, these students would come by the gym. The lady who was the Phys. Ed. teacher at the school, who actually spoke quite good English, was really a big champion for me, and she gave us a space. I had Laubach literacy books. If you ever heard of the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia, these are books they use to teach native English speakers who are illiterate. It's famous for helping people who managed to get out of school without learning to read English. They were just paper teaching material, I didn't have to have a computer or anything. The school was happy to make copies for me. I gave this book to the students who needed it, and they practiced writing with little dotted guidelines. It got the students from not being able to write their names to being able to write their names and a little better.

Like I said, I had one student in particular who was a real success. She was terrified of me at first. She was really, really convinced she was going to fail nursing school, and then return to her little village to be a rice farmer for the rest of her life with backbreaking labor. And so I said, "Okay, let's do this." I sat down with her. It took a long time, but it worked. I had a difficult cultural moment at the successful conclusion of my tutoring. It was occasioned by her show of gratitude, which is, if you are abjectly gracious, full of gratitude, in Thailand, the way you do it is by literally groveling. You lay yourself on the floor in front of the person and sort of claw at their feet, like this a little bit, really close to the floor.

Q: So up to now I've been picturing you as the teacher in Good Morning, Vietnam, but now you're the king of Siam in the King & I.

MCAULEY: When she passed the class and went on to her second year, she came down, in public, with people there, just got right down on her knees and salaamed me. And that was really embarrassing. But I knew that this was a tremendous display of emotion for a Thai person.

Q: Had she been able to read in Thai or she was functionally illiterate?

MCAULEY: I believe she could read Thai.

Q: Well English is, maybe not the writing, but the reading, we are so bad at the phonetic—

MCAULEY: Yeah.

Q: —alphabet, writing, so I think most people would be really scared of it.

MCAULEY: In the same classes, I would also have people who had studied English themselves, and spoke it OK. Maybe they had better teachers, and they were actually quite native sounding. Maybe their parents were a little more prosperous, and they got to go to extra schools and stuff like that, and for them my class was a little low-level, a little boring. But they were Thai, so they were perfectly nice about it.

Q: Politically, it was a very tumultuous time in Thailand. There were Prime Ministers being kicked out and things like that.

MCAULEY: We had the first military coup in September 2006. At the time, I felt like: survived military coup, check that box on the bucket list.

But, of course, it was Thailand, so it was the nicest, polite-ist coup possible. It was a bloodless military coup. School was closed for one day only. The second day, it was pretty much back to business as usual. At the time, the prime minister was sort of a charismatic – I don't want to call him Trump-like, but he is a little Trump-like – leader except he was smarter. He was called Thaksin Shinawatra. The traditional leadership of Thailand – what Trump might call the deep state, except there they had a real deep state because they have a hereditary monarchy and aristocracy, a real aristocracy – led the coup. It was the end of September. I remember because the prime minister was actually in New York at the UN General Assembly. And they launched a military coup while he was out of the country.

To go backwards a little bit, the entire summer— I promise I'll get back to the military coup, but first I want to mention, one of the things I did in Thailand is going to Thai cooking schools. There was an astonishing array of Thai cooking schools, and the nicest one we went to was at the Oriental Hotel, which is famous as the hotel is very old, Somerset Maugham stayed there, Joseph Conrad stayed there.

Now, Asia is lovely, but for desserts, you have to go to Europe. In Asia, desserts are usually just wonderful fresh fruit. But at the Oriental they taught us how to make a great dessert – a custard-filled pumpkin.

The reason I mention this: When public protests against Taksin started, my wife, if I may brag about my wife, my wife, was one of the first on this problem. This is always a problem you have at the State Department, when there's a change, and there's demonstrations, there are always some people saying, "Ah, this is nothing." Unlike some people who are political officers, she didn't want to stay in her office in the air conditioning and clear cables. She wanted to go down to where the protests were. Of course, protests were nicer in Bangkok because the Thai won't do anything unless you have tremendously delicious street food, so these were demonstrations with incredibly delicious satay and other street food. The Thai also like to have fun, so they had fun T-shirts. I think my wife still has those fun political satire T-shirts, that would be a wonderful thing for the collection. They have T-shirts with puns on them. People were making up satirical songs. The protests had a party atmosphere. My wife went down to the demonstrations every Friday. Eventually she was joined with other people at the embassy. They did things like estimated crowd size and stuff like that.

Every Friday, while she went to the demonstration, I tried to replicate the custard-filled pumpkin recipe from the cooking school, which was very elaborate, because you had to steam the pumpkin. You boil water in a pot, you put it on a platform above the water, and the steam cooks the pumpkin. I did that for several weeks. She'd come home from the demonstration, and it would be a big, big finale. I would take the pumpkin out of the Dutch oven with my hot mitts, and I would cut it open and the custard would come running out. It had not set correctly. It's like, oh, failure. But luckily, we had six, seven, eight weeks of this. By the time the demonstrations got really big, my custard-filled pumpkin was perfect, delicious, just a dream.

Q: Very good.

MCAULEY: At that same time, three or four weeks before the coup, we went to a diplomatic reception. I didn't get invited to that many diplomatic receptions, so it sort of stood out in my mind. The reception was around the corner from my apartment building

at the home of a US military attaché. There were Thai military guys there, including one guy who was ethnic Lao, and we spoke some Lao with him. He just thought this was hilarious. He was a certain type of Thai—he was a short, Asian guy, but he's immaculately tailored, and not a hair out of place.

I couldn't follow everything that was going on in the conversation at the party. But as far as I could tell, at some point said: "Well, what would you guys think about a military coup?" At that moment, all the Americans panicked, because they were afraid that if they said anything except "No, no, absolutely not," this would be interpreted as a green light. For me, I didn't have a dog in the fight, so it seemed slightly comic at the time, the panic that rippled through the room at this moment. But sure enough, weeks later there was a military coup.

I remember, Susan had just come home from work on the evening of the military coup and said, "Wow, things are really crazy out there." Not long afterward, the phone rang. It was the lead political section FSN [Foreign Service National] saying "It's happening." This was like 8:30 in the evening. Susan left to return to the Embassy, and I knew that she was going to be gone all night, at least.

Q: 2006, maybe?

MCAULEY: 2006 I believe, yes. She was gone all night. She might have told you about that, everybody piled into the embassy. The RSO opened up all of the doors to the kitchen, so they could get snacks, and they worked all through the night. I stayed awake long past midnight. I had my shortwave radio. Unlike Laos, we also had working internet. The first thing I did was I sent out a broadcast message, emailing everybody in my email address book who might conceivably be interested saying, "We are having a military coup now, don't worry, everybody is fine. We're all safe." I lived on the fourteenth floor of the building, looked out over the city, the only difference you could tell was that things were a little quieter than usual.

This high-rise apartment building where I lived with many other Americans from the Embassy, was located between two brothels. The brothels looked like old fashioned drive-in motels in America, except for the fact that once you drove in you could draw a curtain around your car and then walk straight into your room. If I was walking anywhere from my house, I had to walk past them. I had some friendly ladies asking how I was. But on that night, the brothels were operating like normal. That's what I could see. Governments come, governments fall, but certain urges go on and on.

I called my mother because it was eleven o'clock at night in Thailand, so it was the middle of the morning in the US. She had seen it on CNN; she was a little worried. But I told her, "Look, here I am. I'm at home, Susan's at the embassy, there's nothing happening." And I remember I got a call from the Thai wife of an American who we knew. She called up and she said, "Dave, what's going on? Is the king dead?" Because suddenly all of the TV stations switched to military music. Or they just had a blank screen that said, "Programming will resume shortly," or something like that. I said, "No, the king is not dead." Then I told her, "This is a coup d'état." She did not know this word. I didn't know the Thai word for it, although by the next day I had learned the Thai word, which I still retain to this day.

Q: Which is?

MCAULEY: Raṭhprahār. [รัฐประหาร]

I spelled "coup d'état" for her so she could look it up in the dictionary. Susan returned to our apartment at the end of the next day. While she was at the Embassy, she had given me a call or two and clearly there was no reason for anybody to worry.

For my teaching job, I had gotten a call at eleven o'clock in the evening from someone at my school saying, don't come to work tomorrow. Which was good, I wasn't planning to anyway. The day after that, everything was back to normal. I went to work like usual and had classes. I taught the word coup d'état in all of my classes. One or two of the teachers said this wasn't a coup d'état, because they approved of the new military government. I said, "Sorry, but I'm the English teacher, I say it's a coup d'état." I pointed out that the international news media was using the word, so the students needed to know it.

Nicolas Cage was in Bangkok at the time. I remember it was a big deal. He was making a film in which he was a tough guy. When the coup happened, his handlers called the embassy, and they were terrified that something would happen to Nick. The Embassy said, "Nothing's going to happen to you." I mean, he's at like, the fanciest hotel in town, it's probably safer than the US.

Q: Coups take a lot of different shapes in different parts of the world.

MCAULEY: I was extremely, extremely fortunate. It could have been a lot worse.

Q: And another development that was scary in Thailand happened before you got there, and that would have been the big tsunami, right?

MCAULEY: Yeah, that actually happened while I was in Thai language training.

Q: Okay, and were people talking about that still?

MCAULEY: People talked about that, that it was a sad thing. The sort of people I taught were actually people who were too poor to go to foreigner resorts, so it was sort of like it had happened in a different country to them.

Let's see, so just about being a spouse and things that spouses can do. One of the things I really loved to do, and I would do this if my wife wanted to work on Saturday, was at the big movie theaters down in the center of town where the shopping malls for foreigners [were], they showed Thai movies with English subtitles. I thought this was a great opportunity, and I went every weekend for months on end. I would see Thai movies, especially comedies. Some of them were really stupid, the Thai sense of humor never really translates. I watched a lot of Thai comedies, and there were a lot of jokes about dog poop and dwarves and stuff like that. But they were very, very interesting from a cultural point of view. I tried to get some other spouses to come with me, and they just weren't interested, but I felt like I learned a lot about Thailand. Based on this experience, I formulated what I told my wife was the unified field theory of Thai culture, which is everything in Thai culture, all music, all movies, all literature, was about the struggle with modernity. Because the Thai wanted to be modern, because you had painless dentistry and fly screens and international travel and all sorts of good things. But they also didn't want to lose their identity as Thai.

There were actually one or two super good Thai movies about that. And a lot of silly movies sort of dealt with this struggle with modernity in an interesting way. I saw one movie that was about modern kids in the city, like four different kids, they had different things that they wanted. One, he wanted to pass an important test. One, he wanted to get a girlfriend. One, he wanted their mother to get well and come home from the hospital. So, all these kids had gone to a traditional Thai spirit house in the center of the city among these apartment blocks and prayed to it. And then they got what they wanted. But the problem was that once they had gotten what they wanted, they had to go back and do a traditional Thai dance in public, because that's how you thanked the spirits for giving you what you wanted. You did a traditional dance, during which you wore a funny costume with a pointy hat, and you painted your face and stuff like that. The whole movie was about these kids who were modern, didn't want to paint themselves and have people see them do it. And eventually, they sort of embraced their Thai-ness and said, this is who we are. They do their dance proudly. But this was a Thai comedy movie, so there were also jokes about dog poop and jokes about dwarves, but I felt that there was an important thing in the center that I learned from bothering to go out and see these movies.

I didn't read any reviews about these movies; I would only go look at the poster. I wouldn't go see horror movies, which the Thai loved, but if something looked like it was going to be a comedy, I'd say okay, let's go. I tried to come away from every movie with one new Thai word. Sometimes it wasn't a very useful word. I remember one time I learned a word, which was, if you're a Buddhist monk, you have special pronouns to refer to yourself and others. I learned this special first person pronoun for Buddhist monks only, I believe it was "attiman," the equivalent of "I.". If you are not a Buddhist monk, you cannot use this word. This learning was of limited practical utility, but still, I was always pleased with the word I got.

I also did language-learning stuff like, at the school they subscribed to all the newspapers, but people would leave them the next day in the garbage. So, I took them out of the garbage. I cut out all the political cartoons and I pasted them into a notebook, and then I would write a translation around it on the surrounding page. I would show it to the other teachers, who thought I was charmingly weird to be doing this. A lot of times, they would read the political cartoon and laugh, but then they couldn't explain the joke to me.

And also, Susan and I took evening Thai classes together. Now, we just discussed this yesterday, and I said, "I remember you were late for every class, and usually I was stuck speaking Thai one-on-one with the teacher for most of the class." And Susan said, "I don't remember that." I said, "I remember it really well. It was hard!" In these classes, Susan and I also watched Thai soap operas in tiny, tiny, tiny bits. I understand there are now apps for various languages that sort of replicate this activity. You can watch with subtitles and listen to what the native speakers say. So that was how we did it. The school was near our house so we had a short walk home afterward. But Susan was always busy, and there was always some last thing that needed to be signed out or discussed or something, so she was almost always late.

Q: But it sounds like you were quite busy. This wasn't a situation where you hung out with the other spouses that much during the day, you didn't have time.

MCAULEY: Sorry, I have to tell more funny stories about Susan.

The Marine Ball was always a running joke in our life because every year we went to the Marine Ball. I respect the Marines and stuff like that, but we never really had a good time at the Marine Ball. Every year, it was miserable in a new and interesting way. Actually, miserable is a strong word. But not really fun in a normal way.

This is a story about a time the Marine Ball was not one hundred percent miserable. Susan didn't like this thing where you sit with the country team at the Marine ball. The political boss and the econ boss and the RSO sit together. It's like high school, the cool kids all sitting together. I agree with her one hundred percent.

First year, she chose a random table because no one from the country team was there. Instead, the table was four people from Embassy Phnom Penh who didn't talk to us, plus an ancient retired Marine with his, like, seventeen-year-old Thai wife. The old Marine was mostly grumpy at us and accused us of being insufficiently patriotic. Afterwards, I said to Susan, "You happy now? We didn't sit with the country team."

The next year, I remember the Marines do this— I'm sure you've sat through it— elaborate ceremony with a birthday cake to start the Marine Ball. They bring out the cake, and they shout out orders, like, "Present the cake!" And now you're laughing. Now, this is a foreshadowing. What happened? And then when it's done, a Marine shouted the order, "Retire the cake!" Susan made a horse laugh out loud at this order. You could hear a pin drop otherwise. I, of course, thought it was hilarious, because Susan would normally never do something— this would be the sort of thing that I would do. But she did the horse laugh, and then she just sort of looked around indignantly like, "Who did that? Who did that?"

I think that year was the same year that, during the heartwarming video about the purpose of the Marines in the world, a frog came hopping onto the dance floor. The frog leapt and hopped all over the dance floor during the very serious heartwarming video. I thought Bangkok was founded on a swamp, it's a swamp, of course there are frogs everywhere.

Q: And the frog came to dance.

MCAULEY: Well, the joke was, oh, he escaped from the kitchen.

So Marine Balls was something that, call me a bad patriot, but just something I didn't really look forward to.

Q: Yeah, they're pretty uneven.

MCAULEY: Starting about this time, I achieved sufficient status and seniority so that I was often at the very far corner of the table of honor, at the front of the hall, where everyone could see me. One time I sat next to the marine gunnery sergeant's wife, who was actually an ex-marine herself, and was covered in tattoos. She had a backless dress, so there was a lot to read. But she was difficult to make conversation with.

The next year at the Marine Ball, I was with a guy who was only forty years old, was younger than me, but he was the oldest Marine in the country, and therefore a person who was honored specially. He felt bad because he remembered going to these things where the oldest marine seemed unimaginably old, and now here he was. He was actually somebody from the State Department, working on the lock hardware at the embassy. He just happened to be at the Embassy at the moment the Marine Ball was taking place.

In spite of the fact that I am by temperament an introvert, I learned how to make conversation with people I didn't know anything about, and I didn't really have a whole lot in common with, like an ex-Marine turned locksmith.

The most interesting thing that I went to in my role as an Embassy spouse was a concert in Bangkok by the Preservation Hall Jazz Band in honor of the King of Thailand. Now, the king of Thailand – now he's the late king of Thailand, actually seemed to be a very, very nice man. Before he died, he was the longest-serving monarch in the world, even longer than Queen Elizabeth. Since then, Queen Elizabeth has moved past him in length of service.

The King of Thailand was starting to go downhill, healthwise, at the time we were there. Every year, and this had been going on for like thirty years, the Preservation Hall Jazz Band came to Bangkok, because the king of Thailand was actually a reasonably good jazz musician. He actually composed jazz music, too. We have a recording of Jack Teagarden playing one of the tunes The King wrote when he was in his twenties. The King apparently loved the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, it was like America's secret diplomatic weapon. So they came every year, and they did sort of a public reception. Then, they went to the palace and they jammed with the king all night long. We punched that ticket and then Preservation Hall would appear again the next year. Susan and I were invited to a private concert in Bangkok. In addition to loving Preservation Hall Jazz Band, I don't get invited to stuff like this so often, so I was very excited.

The concert was at [a] military base in the center of Bangkok. We went, and there was an elevated table for the really, really important people. We sat at round tables at a lower elevation).

The concert was also sad because it was the first year where the King didn't come. I was actually hoping to be able to see the King in person. But again, he was starting to decline. The crown prince, who is now the king, came, and let's just say the crown prince is a more controversial figure, now and then, than his Father, who was just loved like a saint.

The crown prince had been married several times. At that time, he had a new consort, who came with him. The consort brought a dog, whose name was Fufu. All of the Thai royal pets had high military ranks. The dog's name, and I'm not kidding, was Air Chief Marshal Fufu. And the dog, which was like a little dog that could walk on the table, was dressed in little military-looking booties and a little vest with decorations on it that made him look like a military officer.

This was a time when everybody first started to have flip phones. The US Ambassador, Skip Boyce, came with the lady who was head of the Embassy's public diplomacy section, because the ambassador didn't have a wife around. The escort was the head of the public diplomacy (PD) section, Susan and the others were friends with her. So they called her on the phone, and in Thailand speaking on the phone while you're at a fancy reception is no problem, completely culturally appropriate. So we called the head of PD, and we got blow-by-blow reports, so we could know what was happening at the head table without actually gawking. What happened was that the ambassador, who had a slightly playful sense of humor, asked the prince's consort, "Where is Air Chief Marshal Fufu?" Air Chief Marshal Fufu was sitting quietly at her feet. The consort picked up Air Chief Marshal Fufu and put him on the table. Our Ambassador petted him and said he was a good dog. The conversation moved on. Meanwhile, Air Chief Marshal Fufu walked up and down the table and drank out of people's water glasses and ate things from important people's plates.

Q: Oh my!

MCAULEY: Which, of course, no one could complain about.

Q: And it was all the ambassador's fault.

MCAULEY: Yes.

Q: Who was the ambassador, again?

MCAULEY: Skip Boyce, and he was a lovely, lovely man. Susan got along with him super well, charming man. Ambassador Boyce also played the drums, and so he actually went up on the bandstand during the concert and sat in with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band for a song.

Q: Oh, how wonderful.

MCAULEY: Ambassador Boyce knew that he wasn't up to the level of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, so he just, like, sat in on one song, said thank you for the honor, and then retired.

The US Ambassador had a wonderful, wonderful property for his residence, a priceless piece of property in the center of the most expensive district. It was an enormous green space in the center of Bangkok. It was like a traditional Thai house, only grander. Elsewhere on the property, there was a mother-in-law house, which I understand was built in the '50s. The story was that John Foster Dulles was Secretary of State, and he came to visit. The Ambassador at the time didn't want Dulles as a house guest because the house is actually kind of small for an ambassador's house. The Ambassador was a rich guy, he just had another house built in the same style.

So, our ambassador had a lovely, lovely, little, elegant house. We only got to go over to dinner there once. I remember, because in one of those weird coincidences that happens in a big city, my wife's main contact at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Americas desk, his wife, was the librarian at the school I taught at. So we knew both of them. The wife was funny, she knew who I was, but it was several weeks before she shyly mentioned our connection. That's a Thai thing, not putting yourself forward like that.

My school's librarian was invited because the American desk officer and his boss were invited. The Ambassador and Susan were hosting, because there was no Ambassador's wife on the scene. And so I was invited, and the librarian was invited. The librarian was terrified.

It's easy to be American, because of course, you don't try to humiliate yourself, but in the end, there isn't this enormous cloud of shame hanging over you if you use the wrong fork. But the librarian, a Thai, was just terrified she would humiliate herself. Susan changed the seating assignment so that she was sitting next to me. She was to the left of the ambassador and I was to her left. I helped her; she would always be looking at what utensil was I reaching for. I mean, I don't consider myself an incredibly well-bred person, but I guess I seemed like an expert. At one point, the ambassador turned to her and said, "This lady works with somebody from the embassy." The librarian was pleased that she got some personal attention from the Ambassador, and she didn't just have to sit in silence the whole meal. That is something a good Ambassador does: makes his guests feel at ease. As for me, I felt good that I was able to make her feel more at ease.

I will repeat myself here. My advice to diplomatic spouses is: get language training. Because you find yourself in so many situations where you find language skills useful. For example, in Bangkok, there was wonderful medical care, premium medical care for

foreigners. Actually, one of the best hospitals was like ten minutes walk from the high-rise apartment building that we lived in. We would always go and get a really thorough checkup every year, it was great.

But one year, for example, for one scan, they wanted you to have a really, really, really full bladder. The Thai lady who was doing the scan was, like, looking at something else, distracted. And I was waiting, waiting, waiting, full of water, I felt really uncomfortable. And finally, somebody said to her in Thai, "What about this foreigner guy?" And she said, "He needs to have a scan." The man asks her, "Why don't you do it?" She says, "Mi koi fuh," which means "He's not quite full," "His bladder is not quite full," which I understood. So I said, in Thai, "Mi koi fuh pen pi mi di," which is, "Not quite full? That's not possible!" She was mortified and so she got up, and she took care of me right away.

Q: Very good. Well, you had need!

MCAULEY: I also learned how to type in Thai, which was useful at school. I remember, I bought a CD-ROM (that was the state of technology at the time). And I practiced. The only problem with the CD-ROM was it played "Dixie" over and over, which is one of my least favorite songs, and you couldn't turn it off.

And what else. I'm coming to the end of my Thai stuff.

We went to Hong Kong, our last Thai New Year— Thai Lunar New Year is slightly different from Chinese Lunar New Year. It comes one month later. Everything shuts down for a week. It's sort of like Chinese New Year in the Chinese-influenced countries. The first couple of times, Thai New Year is great. People throw water at each other. They have big parties, they get drunk. First couple of times, it's very interesting, but after a while you join the large minority of prosperous Thais who just leave the country for a long weekend.

The last year we lived in Thailand, we went to Hong Kong for the Thai New Year holiday. I remember I was wearing this windbreaker that I had from my Thai nursing school with the name of the school in Thai letters. Some high-class Thai who were also waiting with me for the funicular railway came up to me and they were starting to give me a hard time, "Why are you wearing this? What right do you have to wear this? This is the Queen's personal project." And I came back at them in Thai saying, "Yes, I am the only foreigner who works there. I am the English teacher. We teach one hundred nurses every year. It's a great school, I really enjoy working there." And they were like, they just sat there with their mouths open, because I spoke Thai, probably not perfectly, but well enough. Actually, they were completely friendly after that moment, and we had a nice

chat, but they were sort of getting ready to have attitude. I think that's it about Thailand. Anything else about Thailand?

Q: No, sounds good. You were busy. And Susan was busy, so you probably didn't travel as much in Thailand as you would have otherwise.

MCAULEY: I always felt grateful to those coup-makers because one of the reasons why Susan didn't want to go to Thailand was, she felt she couldn't get promoted to the senior Foreign Service. And then she got promoted to the senior Foreign Service anyway.

Thanks, generals.

Q: Very good. So, from Thailand, Susan got into the senior Foreign Service. And I don't know if that job was ranked for a senior Foreign Service officer, but she was asked to go to Sofia as DCM to Bulgaria. What year are we in now?

MCAULEY: We came back in 2008. We had a year of language training, and we left in 2009.

Q: So that's a big change from Asia.

MCAULEY: Yeah, we were back in the Balkans again. My wife said previously she wanted to get a break from the Balkans and wanted to go to Asia, because she wanted to see a place with a future and not just the past. But still, this came up. So, we came back to the US, and we were in New York City again for home leave. We were able to get a sublet at a slightly different place in the West Village. We were in Manhattan when the financial crisis hit. It was a weird time to be there, actually there was a sense of unreality. People knew that this was bad, but the results had not really started to bubble up yet. So everybody was carrying on with their life as normal, including us. We had a wonderful time, even if this cloud of doom was hanging over the city. So that was the other time we got to use our home leave.

We went to Bulgarian language training. Bulgarian is quite a bit like Russian and so Russian helped quite a bit, and I didn't really feel like I was floundering at any time. Even though, as usual, after the first week Susan was off with the smart kids, and I was with the other kids. We learned Bulgarian, and it's a Cyrillic language. Knowing Russian and the alphabet helped a lot. It had funny grammar bits that were a little bit like Romanian also. There was this weird mixture of Russian and Romanian.

I remember, I took a day off language training to work at the polling place for Obama's first election, I worked here in Washington and Lee High School near my house.

The Bulgarian teacher invited us over to our house for a traditional dinner, that was something that didn't happen in other language classes. That was great. Also, we found out there's a big community in Montgomery County, Maryland, of people from the Balkans. And even though they're from different countries in the Balkans, they all forget their differences and they have great big dance blowout things where they all do their traditional circle dances. She loves Bulgarian music, and now Susan is taking Bulgarian music classes online, even now, in her retirement. Bulgaria had really, really cool music, unique, and that was one thing that we knew before we went there that we really, really loved about it.

Bulgaria was not my favorite posting, but I still have a lot of lovely, lovely, lovely memories. Again, I'm glad I learned the language. I got out of the house. I taught English. Because of the economic problems and things like that, the majority of my work was volunteer work. I would say my biggest single job, I worked at a Protestant Theological Seminary that I got roped into by some American missionaries who were there. They were trying to get a Protestant Theological Seminary started in this traditionally Orthodox country, and I said, sure, why not? And so I taught English at a Theological Seminary. Also, I tried and actually succeeded in getting a job at the University of Sofia, which is the big, prestigious state-run university that's hundreds of years old. Except it was an incredibly dysfunctional institution and I was treated very badly, so I left after one term.

Susan loved Bulgarians because she worked at the embassy and they treated her nicely. But Bulgarians also were astonishingly rude under some circumstances. This is sort of like a Russian thing, where, like Russians, if they decide that you are part of their family and you're a good person, they'll smother you with affection. But if they don't, then they can, like, walk over your dead body, they don't care.

I also enjoyed life in Sofia because we lived in a proper DCM's house, for the first time. Of all the places I've lived in my life and will live until I die, this was the nicest place. It was the most wonderful house. Oh, my God. It, of course, was formerly the house of high-ranking Communist Party members until 1989. And the city of Sofia sits in a bowl, basically, and so we're sort of halfway up the side of the bowl, up a mountain. We had a lovely view, and we had a great big green space where we would have, like, the Easter Egg Roll every year.

Q: For the kids in the embassy community?

MCAULEY: Right. Also, we were involved with the little, tiny, expatriate Anglican Episcopal Church, and we would have ceremonies, like we had a baptism, in the garden outside our house. Our house was lovely. And the only problem was, it was the nicest place in the country, so we never wanted to leave. In particular, this office that you see around me now is perfectly nice, but I had the loveliest office in Sofia, it was on the ground floor, and had a beautiful view of the garden.

Right now we're getting ready to move away from DC, and Susan is obsessed with getting built-in bookshelves in our new house, not IKEA furniture, but built-in bookshelves. That's because, in Sofia, we had a great study which had lovely built-in bookshelves. I had a little table where the servants would come and bring me lunch. I didn't have to walk all the way to the dining room, or heaven forbid, the kitchen. It felt super elegant. And we had lovely, lovely staff in Bulgaria.

One thing I think I told you about in Laos, we had several lovely ladies and gentlemen who were staff. In Thailand, we just had one lady who, actually, we met her here in Arlington, because she was here being an au pair for a family who had previously been posted in Bangkok. That family was going to Ukraine, and they were going to give her up. I met this guy on the street who I worked with in the Operations Center, and it's like, "Hey, Kent, what are you doing?" I said, "Oh, I'm going to Thailand." He said, "Oh, I have a Thai lady who wants to work as a maid. Why don't you hire her?" It's like yeah, okay.

Q: Was this Kent Logsdon?

MCAULEY: Yes.

Q: Yeah, he's an A-100 classmate of mine.

MCAULEY: Yeah, I'd worked with him in the Operations Center. He lived here in Arlington, his house was, like, less than two miles away. We met our future maid, she was fine. So we agreed, eight months from now, when we're all in Bangkok, you'll work for us. "How will you find us?" We asked her. She said, "Don't worry, I'll find you." Which is exactly what happened. She somehow knew through the grapevine, you know, exactly where we lived and what our phone number was and when we were arriving.

All those people were wonderful. But the servants in Bulgaria were the pinnacle.

Q: That's so interesting.

MCAULEY: In Bulgaria, we had three ladies working in the house. The person who was DCM previous to Susan had two teenage daughters, and his aged Greek grandmother all living in the house, so the staff had enough work. But us, it was just the two of us and the cat. The ladies didn't have so much to do but they kept the house immaculate.

The cook was sort of the head of the staff. She was a former pastry chef, and she didn't mind cooking for us, but what she really liked to do was make desserts. So of course, we both gained twenty pounds. We would eventually do stuff like we would say, "No more desserts until the end of the month." We would say this on the thirteenth. And then on the afternoon of the thirty-first, since the next day was the new month, she would make us a drop dead delicious key lime pie.

Q: Very comfortable, right. Had to tell them what to do for a party or anything?

MCAULEY: No, never.

Since that time in Bulgaria, I have gone to Foreign Service Institute and I talked about being a DCM spouse, because I was invited a couple of times, in part because I am a man, I'm unusual. I always said to people, don't get in the way of the staff, don't tell them what to do. Just cultivate the attitude where ten minutes before the guests arrive, you put on a clean shirt, and you come down and, however it is, that's perfect, it's just the way I wanted it. I have to say, I'm going to be slightly critical of my DCM spouse colleagues, especially ladies. Many women spouses were always talking about how they had these servants, and they didn't like them, and they did things wrong, and they were stealing. I always felt like that was a really, really bad attitude to take. I remember I almost had an argument in one of those sessions because a lady said, "It's my house!" And I said, "No, it isn't, the government's paying for it, it's there for you to entertain." That really got me in the doghouse. I was never invited back to talk to DCM wives after I said that. But I always felt you should stay out of the way and let the staff do their work, and I never had any problem with that.

For example, because there was not a lot of work to do for the staff in Bulgaria, they discovered new frontiers of decorating. For example, like one of the ladies would go out in the garden around the house. We had an enormous garden and a gazebo and trees. And she would go out in the fall and curate the best, loveliest leaves. She would pick them up delicately. She would bring them into the house and maybe dry them off. I saw her wiping them delicately with a sponge, and then she would pin them to the drapes. And then when Christmas time came, she did the same thing with those little red berries that grow on trees, whose name escapes me now. She was looking for stuff to do, but it was great. The little leaves and berries looked great pinned to the drapes. I loved that.

Our house was next to the ceremonial house of the President of Bulgaria. They have a parliamentary system, so the president is more of a figurehead, not like our President. But the president, at least for the first half of the time we were there, had a son who was famous in country as sort of a twenty-ish playboy, one of those nomenklatura kids. He would come home in his fast car, and when he arrived home late at night, he would put on really loudly, AC/DC, "You Shook Me All Night Long." I told all the Bulgarians that They thought it was great. The Bulgarians loved that, they loved the gossip.

Q: And the teaching, you're kind of private tutoring at this point?

MCAULEY: I had a pretty steady, but really volunteer, gig at the theological seminary. The Bulgarian lady who was head of the theological seminary was getting her PhD, but she had to pass an English test. With her and one or two other people, I spent a lot of time. I went on a study tour with the seminary of the Seven Churches of Apocalypse, which is, in the New Testament, there are seven letters from churches in Asia Minor, now Turkey. And those were real places: Ephesus, Smyrna. There was a bus tour that took you to all the places and talked about them. I went with the students. I brought some English lessons. When the bus was moving, I stood on the moving bus and held onto the luggage racks and taught English as best I could. It was a great, great trip. There were a couple of actual biblical scholars on the trip. So that was really a fun thing to be able to do.

The most fun I had in Bulgaria was acting in movies.

Q: Acting in movies?

MCAULEY: Yes. Now, many people don't know that Sofia is a place to make low-budget movies.

Q: For Hollywood?

MCAULEY: For Hollywood, yeah. You can see me in two movies, I could actually show you one of the boxes. One was called Spiders 3D. And the other one was called Re-Kill, and that was a zombie movie.

Q: And you were an extra, or did you have lines?

MCAULEY: I had lines.

Right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Embassy signed a bilateral work agreement. Anybody who was an Embassy spouse could work in Bulgaria, including acting in movies. And many spouses did. In addition, foreign service officers who worked at the embassy took time off, took vacation days from their paying job in order to do this. And then they could not accept payment. They could only do it as volunteers, for the glamor of show business.

Q: But it was fun, I bet.

MCAULEY: It was fun, and my part ended up in movies. The first movie I did was called Re-Kill, and it is a zombie movie. The plot of this movie is: the zombie apocalypse happened, but it didn't kill everybody, a lot of people lost their lives. But then there was sort of a standoff with the remaining zombies. The world is rebuilding and there's sort of something like a society, including television, and there's television programs, and there's television programs with commercials.

A fake commercial inside the movie is what I appeared in. And the fake commercial is for a medicine that prevents you from succumbing to zombie bites. It's a parody on those "ask your doctor about blah, blah, blah" advertisements. I did a testimonial. I sat on the couch, and I did a testimonial. I had four or five lines and I memorized them. The movie turned out to be a troubled shoot. The movie spent years in Hollywood development limbo, I don't know exactly what happened, but finally, it got released.

In the movie, my movie wife is attacked by a zombie and I use this medicine and therefore she lives, but she loses her arms and her legs. The studio casting department found a genuine Bulgarian lady who had lost their arms and legs in a car accident. She was a doctor, she smoked like a chimney. She sat there next to me on the couch, she did not speak English, and Bulgarians are not so big on small talk anyway, so she didn't say anything for a long time. So we sat there.

I found out what it's like to work in the movies, it's like you are a piece of meat. The first thing you do is they tell you to sit down on that couch and don't move. And then you spend like forty-five minutes there doing nothing while everyone is fussing with the lights and the sound and everything like that. Meanwhile, the lady, my in-movie wife, got a mischievous look in her eye, and she sort of grabbed my hand with one of her arm stumps, and she wrapped my hand around her stump in order to see if I would freak out. But I didn't. It's like, yeah, lady, okay, fine, whatever.

It was funny, I had had a heads up about the possibility of the behavior like this from the movie casting director, who was a very nice lady. Everybody at the embassy knew her.

She told me, Bulgarians, they get very upset when they see people with missing limbs. They don't want to see them. They don't want to know them. They think they're bad luck. I think my in-movie wife expected me to melt down in a puddle of anxiety.

That was the biggest shot in the movie, maybe 30 seconds' screen time. After that, I did an establishing shot, because I was, like, a suburban dad. So there's also shots of me standing in front of my suburban home in the sunlight, and stuff like that. That took, like, twelve hours, most of it waiting around.

A funny thing the Bulgarian studio did, because I think they knew that everybody from the Embassy really liked it, was they had trailers, and they put trailers with your name on it, just like you were a movie star. You could say, "I'll be in my trailer." Just like a big star, right? There were several people from the embassy there, at some point. One by one, we pretended we were the big star throwing a fit and storming into our trailers. And the others would be the people standing around saying "No, no." Maybe it sounds very childish, but it was fun.

The second movie was called "Spiders 3D."

You may remember that there was a fad for a little while, I think this was 2010, where we were going to have 3D television?

Q: Oh, maybe.

MCAULEY: This movie was being made for 3D television. The version that I own on DVD is a conventional movie, but it was made for 3D television. The name of my role was "Man in Suit Number Two." And the guy who was vice head of Peace Corps was "Man in Suit Number One." The movie was about giant spiders attacking Manhattan.

The studio asked me, did I have a suit I could wear? Now, I don't want to look crummy in a movie, so I wore my nice suit that I got tailored in Bangkok. And the studio wardrobe department looked at my suit and said "That suit's too nice." They gave me a crummy raincoat with stains on it. It was funny because the trench coat had one of those things on the cuff, maybe they are called "tabs" (is that right?) and it was untied. Now if you are a bit part, you wait around the set for a long time. At one point, I absently tied my tab back together. Soon after, the costume lady came over and looked at us. She looked at me, she untied my tab again. That's attention to detail, I guess but as far as I can tell, the cuff is not visible in the movie.

In that scene, I played a plain-clothes policeman, sort of a mid-level bureaucrat. You know how these movies work. In the beginning, something happens, somebody dies because of the monster. And then authority figures have to come on and say, "There's nothing to see here. It's all completely normal." And then the mayhem can really start. So my role is to say everything is okay and it's completely normal.

The shooting was one day, twelve, fourteen hours, as usual a lot of waiting around. One of the stars was a former porn star. She was trying to go legit. The other ones were actors that I've since seen in movies. One of them was an actor who ... I saw him in a movie where he played Jim Baker.

Q: Oh, how interesting.

MCAULEY: He only had a small role, but it was the same actor. In this movie, he's sort of a military guy.

I didn't work at the embassy, so I actually got paid to act. I got paid like 750 bucks in Bulgarian currency for the zombie movie, and 500 bucks for the Spiders movie.

There were a couple of other opportunities that I wasn't called for, I'm sad. There was one movie that they were making of Tom Sawyer. One of the other embassy husbands that I had sat through Bulgarian language training with, he had a speaking role in the Tom Sawyer movie.

Q: It's a long way to go to make a Tom Sawyer movie.

MCAULEY: Well, the thing about Bulgaria is that it has almost every type of climate and every type of topography you want. The movie studio was, of course, the former communist movie studio that the post-Communist government decided they had to make a profitable business.

The studio had a downtown New York City street set that was really authentic looking. You know those boxes in downtown New York City that say, "The Writing Center"? They're like yellow boxes, the studio had them, maybe somebody stole them. They had newspaper boxes, they had authentic looking garbage pails full of garbage. They had cars that looked like New York City police cars but did not actually say New York City Police on them and so on. Some of the stores, actually they worked, they were more than a facade. You opened the door and you walked in and there was a fake bakery. And the studio also had a set that looked like an Italian village circa 1945.

And they had a big Roman-looking Coliseum set. I remember, when I was trying out for my first movie, they were filming a movie on the set called "This is Sodom." There were extras wandering around in Roman costumes. Wonder what that movie was like.

So, I worked at the movies. That was very, very exciting, it was fun.

Also, I did what they call "voice talent" work. I read a script. Somebody had developed an app, they were putting YouTube videos on explaining how the app worked. The app was called "Scribe to Go." And I did think about it, I didn't download a copy, and eventually, it was taken off YouTube. That was sad. But I got, like, \$200 for two hours' work.

Q: I can see that. You have a nice deep voice with gravitas. You guys were in Bulgaria for three years?

MCAULEY: Three years.

One of the things that I did in Bulgaria that I'm actually proudest of was volunteer work with a village called Lopyan. It was a little village that was, like, ninety minutes outside of Sofia. It was sad because little villages like that in Bulgaria are being deserted, many houses are empty. This town had an orphanage. Most of the kids were Gypsy kids. The orphanage was appalling, in a lot of ways, and so the Embassy helped.

I was actually quite pleased that I was able to help because, as you probably know, often at an Embassy, somebody gets a great idea. Someone says: we're going to help, and they start a project. And then the person leaves the post and the project ends. Well, this was something that had been handed down through from three or four generations of Foreign Service Officers. The guy who was organizing the project when we arrived, he was an officer. He worked in the political section. My wife really liked him. And when he was leaving, he asked me to take care of it.

I don't normally think of myself as a project leader. But I said "right", because I had gone to the orphanage several times. The Embassy didn't do anything fancy: just go there, you play with the kids, maybe try to identify a small need and then fill it. We did things like, we had a big Christmas drive, and people would contribute stuff, they would buy things or contribute money, and we'd bring Christmas presents for all the kids. Usually, little cars, dolls, and stuff like that.

One time, the public diplomacy section had brought some break dancers. And it was Saturday afternoon, they weren't doing anything, they had a show in Sofia in the evening. We convinced them to go out to Lopyan with us, and put on a show for the kids.

Q: What kind of dancers?

MCAULEY: Break dancers, they spin around on their heads. And the kids were just flabbergasted. They'd probably seen that on TV, but never in person. The break dancers gave the kids at the orphanage a little class and stuff, and the kids were just like, wow.

Otherwise, Embassy volunteers would just go and play with the orphans. The Marines always came and challenged the orphans to the physical exercise tests, like pull ups. The rest of us would play catch and we would run around.

To get people involved, I just said, come once, it's not a big thing, we'd love to have you. Often we would have a big convoy out from the embassy. There was a gas station on the main highway next to the exit for the orphanage. We would regroup there. You could fill up your car with gas and have the most delicious, traditional Bulgarian pastries ever. At the gas station, go figure. So we would all meet, and have a traditional Bulgarian pastry and we fill up our cars. And then we went out to the village in a convoy and we played with the kids for a while, and then we went home, after maybe two or three hours.

I was nominated for an award, the name of which I have forgotten, but you probably remember, this is an award that spouses get for volunteer activities.

Q: SOSA [The Secretary of State Award for Outstanding Volunteerism]?

MCAULEY: Maybe, I don't know, I've forgotten now. Every year they nominate people. I was nominated, I did not win. I want to talk a little bit about that. My wife told me today, "Don't talk about it. It's just going to sound like you're angry you didn't win." But, no, I'm not angry I didn't win. Like anybody, I love to have honors and attention. But my reaction at that time in Bulgaria when I didn't win was, thank God, I didn't want to have to fly back all the way to Washington to accept the award. You have to fly back, and you go to the seventh floor and you have a ceremony and all that stuff. I'd rather stay in my comfortable home.

So time passed, we were leaving Sofia. One thing I was dreading was finding someone else to carry on the project after I left. I told myself: I have to find somebody else, this can't die with me. I have to find somebody else. After some thinking, I found a wife that I identified could do it. I fretted about approaching her. I thought to myself, "How am I

going to approach this lady, she's, like, a thin, blonde and elegant Air Force wife. I said to myself: Oh, my God. I've got to do this, but I was really scared. One day, I was at the embassy, and we happened to be leaving at the same time. She asks me, "Do you want to ride home?" I said to myself: Thank you, Jesus. While she drove me home, I popped the question, as it were. And she said yes.

Q: Oh, how wonderful.

MCAULEY: I was so happy. When you're an adult, you don't have those moments where you just feel so happy, like you are a child again. That was one of those moments.

The lady who took over from me won the award, the same award I was nominated for.

Q: Yay!

MCAULEY: Which was great. It was funny, when that happened, somebody who knew me from Bulgaria contacted me and said, "I can't believe that she won the award and you didn't." And I was like, "No problem." I was happy that she took this from me and then she got recognized. I went to the ceremony honoring her on the seventh floor, because we were living in DC at the time—

Q: Do you remember her name?

MCAULEY: Carrie Carswell.

Q: This was a small orphanage?

MCAULEY: I would say maybe forty to sixty kids.

Q: And mostly what you did with them was to have activities and things, but were there also improvements to their infrastructure? Could you guys raise money?

MCAULEY: I don't remember doing that, no.

Q: Okay.

MCAULEY: Actually, we talked about that, but Bulgaria had a post-Soviet bureaucracy. Anything like that would have to go through the Ministry of Education and other ministries, plus there were building codes, and so on. We were connected with the embassy and everything had to be done in the most by-the-book way possible.

Q: And it was run just by volunteers, or was it nuns or something?

MCAULEY: The orphanage was run by salaried Bulgarian government employees. The orphanage was an official orphanage run by the government, but the government didn't have any money. In the wintertime, there was no heat, as far as I could tell.

Q: You donated clothing and toys and food maybe?

MCAULEY: Yeah, and we went and we entertained them, sang songs and stuff like that. We would go on Saturday, we went like six times a year.

I understood that there was a guy before me and there [were] two generations before him. I really felt very strongly that this was a great thing. Because again, people start charitable projects at Embassies and then when they have no continuity— But we have had a long association with Lopyan. We rounded up people, we got local employees to come. That was nice. Some local employees brought their children with them, to see how poor kids lived and you see how well you have it, which I thought was actually quite useful.

There was a person in Sofia who I felt I helped, a Bulgarian lady named Silva. This was when I started. At first, I was working at the University of Sofia, and I found a private tutor, also through the University of Sofia. For a while we met in cafes in downtown Sofia while I was at the university, but then my job at the university ran out. Then she came to my house to give classes, but my house was a long way out for her, and also there was this weird sort of thing with the woman coming to see the man at the house and we were all alone. So eventually, I decided I would meet her at the embassy. The RSO had been in language training with me, so I called him up and asked about allowing her on the Embassy grounds. He knew that I wasn't a weirdo. I said, "Look, I have this lady. I'm taking independent language classes with her, I pay her myself. Can she come on embassy property?" He said, "Sure, no problem, I'll fix it." She came on embassy property and, to cut a long story short, she slowly became an integrated part of the embassy. She became a contractor who taught people at the embassy. Especially, there were certain people who worked in certain offices of the embassy who liked the fact that there was a new teacher, who probably had not been contacted by areas of the host country government in order to give information, yet. Those people started to use her. Shortly after I left, she sent me an email saying, "This is one of the happiest days of my life. I work at the embassy now. I have a badge and I have a classroom with a white board." That's something. One of the things she did was she marketed herself by coming

out to Lopyan to talk to people, she told them who she was, she met people that way. She was not a dummy. She still sends me emails every year thanking me.

Another thing I did in Sofia as a dependent spouse every year was, I gave a public transit tour. I astonished everyone in Sofia, especially local employees, by riding the buses and the subways. For a while, I was commuting to the University of Sofia. I came into town part-way with my wife. We left the car in the embassy parking lot. Then I took a bus from a stop near the embassy to the University of Sofia. One day the bus pulled up, the doors opened, and the ambassador's lead translator was there. The translator looked at me with her mouth wide open, as if to say, what could you possibly be doing here? She got off, she didn't know me very well. She didn't say anything, just looked at me with her mouth open. I got on the bus, the bus left. And then in the same evening, my wife came home and said, "You astonish people by taking the bus!"

Later, I led a tour for American staff where you could make a circle by public transit from the embassy around Sofia back to the embassy. And so that was something that—

Q: With tourist sites? Like you get off, and you would go get a pastry or something?

MCAULEY: I showed people how to use public transit. You had to buy a book of ten tickets, and you had to carry the entire book with you when you traveled. Every time you got on a bus, you had to cancel the ticket [with] one of the stamping things. So that took a little local knowledge. I bought out of my own pocket a book of tickets. They were like ninety cents each, and everybody got one. People brought their kids and the kids got the book of tickets as souvenirs. That was an embassy spouse thing that I did.

Q: Were there other male spouses?

MCAULEY: Yes. I went through Bulgarian language training with one guy who is still a friend. He was lovely, a great guy, fun to learn with.

His wife was the deputy chief of the consular section. I told you earlier about acting in the zombie movie. She was also in the zombie movie. She used a vacation day and did not accept money, in accordance with State Department rules. She had the coolest, coolest role in the zombie movie. She shot a zombie with a great big gun. What could be better than that for a feature film debut?

Her husband would be great for this project, if I may recommend further spouses to interview. He's far from retirement, his name is Jamie Atkinson. He was really into Southern traditional music. As a spouse, after Bulgaria, he went around some country in

South America, I forget which one, with musicians from the deep south, and he drove around with them. They gave concerts, and he was a Spanish translator.

In every place my wife and I went, there always seemed to be one section of the embassy that seemed to be the biggest trouble spot. You've heard perhaps from my wife that, in Sofia, a lot of work stemmed from her role as the de facto chairman of the school board. That was the trouble spot. Especially the first year, they had a difficult gentleman running the school.

People with the Embassy had our home landline number. My wife was Deputy Chief of Mission and had to work late all the time. She was not at home to handle complaints. As a result, for the first couple of months in Sofia, I was handling calls every day from people who were complaining about school bus pickup, or about some teacher who had been mean to their kid or that their kid had wanted to talk to the principal and the principal hadn't taken the kid seriously. I just wrote all this down and gave the details to Susan when she finally came home. Eventually Susan dealt with the source of the problem. She led a group who ended up changing the head of the school. Once the school had a new director, I didn't hear anything, no calls at home from unhappy parents.

Q: Good afternoon. It's April 5, 2021 and we're continuing our conversation with David McAuley. David, we left off in Bulgaria. I think there were a couple of things you might want to add to that.

MCAULEY: Yes, I have had a week to think about it and mostly it was things about the dependent spouse experience. One thing that dependent spouses can do that is fun and interesting is they can write for the embassy newsletter and I did that. Embassy newsletters were always happy to get the content. For example, once in Bulgaria, we took a road trip to see the home of Baba Vanga, who was a well-known character from the Soviet era. In spite of the fact that the government was supposed to be militantly atheist, Baba Vanga was a famous person. She was a spiritualist and allegedly had the powers to see the future. For example, any Bulgarian you met would tell you that Baba Vanga had, in the 1980s, predicted the collapse of the World Trade Center and Barack Obama's election. Her actual statements, allegedly about these events, were very vague and could have been about anything. But still, Baba Vanga was one of those cultural things where, if you knew about it, you could discuss it with any Bulgarian even if you didn't have anything else in common.

Q: What was the house like?

MCAULEY: Well, she had a little compound with a temple. The temple combined Eastern Orthodox influences with a certain, like spiritualist, new agey sort of a vibe.

We drove almost all the way down to near the Greek border, where it was located. It was a fascinating place to visit and I took a lot of pictures. I turned that into an article for the embassy newsletter. That was one thing I did.

Another thing you do is, you support your spouse when she needs to take part in certain activities that you would normally not want to take part in. For example, in Sofia there were karaoke contests. Susan didn't really want to do it, but I said, "Okay, let's do it. We'll sing together." We turned out doing pretty well. I can do a reasonably good impression of Johnny Cash. We sang the song "Jackson", Johnny and June Carter Cash. And we did really well. And actually, it was very heartwarming at the contest, because I saw evidence that Susan was really, really well liked. She got a tremendous round of applause just for coming on stage. I'm not sure how much applause was just because Susan was a good boss or how much was based on our actual abilities. It came to a point where I turned to Susan, I said, "You know, the boss can't win. The boss can't win the karaoke contest. Right?" She said, "That's right." She sent me over and I talked to one of the judges, who was the ambassador's secretary. I sort of whispered in her ear, "Susan says she can't win," and the secretary nodded her head, she understood the implications of that. So, we came in second. We might have come in second anyway, but still, it was good that somebody else won.

The third thing that I remembered from stuff to do when you're a dependent spouse is—I talked, I think last week about how I find the Marine Ball always very trying. I remember, once when I was in Bulgaria, there was somebody who was clearly having a terrible time, her husband, who had been behaving sort of badly, was going around drinking too much and maybe being a little too handsy on some of the women, especially high school kids. She was clearly very unhappy. I felt like I understood not wanting to be at the Marine Ball. So, I just went and talked to her — in retrospect, sometimes I wonder if she thought that I was a blithering idiot because I just yammered at her nonstop. She laughed sometimes, so I think that actually distracted her a little bit and made the evening a little easier. Those are some more examples of things that a dependent spouse does.

Q: That's very kind. Even kinder than my husband.

MCAULEY: So that was the end of Bulgaria. And in 2014, if I remember correctly, we returned to DC. Susan was office director for two years. While we were in DC, I taught at

two different schools. One was actually right down near the White House called the International Center for Language Studies. It was a private school on Fifteenth Street.

Now, at that time, we owned a house. We still own it. This is the house that I'm sitting in right now in Arlington. But Susan said, while we were still in Bulgaria, she felt that being an office director, she would be working late all the time. She didn't want to drive a car into the Main State building, even if she could get a parking permit. And she didn't want to be taking the subway home late. She asked, could we just live downtown? She knew correctly that my first reaction would, it's more expensive, no. So, she started the discussion by saying, "Don't say no right away." Eventually, we rented an apartment on Fourteenth and N.

Q: I lived near there once.

MCAULEY: It was actually a wonderful time to live there. Obama was president. When Trump had all the trouble, it would have been significantly less fun to live there. But Obama was president, everybody in the neighborhood seemed pretty happy. We lived on 14th Street and we were cooler than we had been before, since we went to nightclubs and trendy bars and things like that. We had a parking space in this apartment building in the center of town, so our suburban friends drove in and parked, just saving them twenty-five dollars. Then we would go out to fancy restaurants. We went to the beer gardens where the cool young kids were, and generally had a really good time.

I started writing online, especially about D.C. politics. First, I wrote for a blog that was pretty popular, because nobody wanted to write about politics in the neighborhood. Everybody wanted to write about bars and restaurants because if you write about bars and restaurants, you get free food and drinks. But if you write about government, you don't get free anything, right? I stepped in and I wrote about it. It turned out to be an interesting time. Just about the time I was starting to write about it, a group of citizens were attempting to use a D.C. law to limit the number of bars and to freeze the number of liquor licenses in the neighborhood. This group actually stirred up a hornet's nest, more than they were anticipating. I wrote about this for months and months. People were very interested.

Q: Did you have your own blog or was it like an online newspaper?

MCAULEY: At first, I was writing for somebody else's blog, which was called Borderstan. That was sort of a nickname they gave to the neighborhood because – at the time they started – it wasn't quite Dupont Circle and it wasn't quite Shaw. So it was sort of on the seam. So, the blog was called Borderstan. I wrote about the proposed liquor

license moratorium This turned out to be something of a little hot issue. For example, there was a very well attended and tense community meeting about this. I wrote about it and later the people who ran the blog told me my post had gotten 100,000 views within the first twenty-four hours. But as I found out later, running a blog is not very profitable and a lot of work. So, the guys who did it, even though it was going very well, they shut it down. Then I decided I was going to start my own blog. It was not going to be about the neighborhood and the trendy restaurants, it was just going to be about the government. I was just going to do the same writing that I did before. This blog, I called it Short Articles About Long Meetings. In 2014, I won a best of DC award for my blog.

Q: Who is that that does best of DC? Is that the Washington Post?

MCAULEY: Washington City Paper. That's the one that's free in the boxes or used to be anyway. I still have a little plaque, you see that I'm showing you now, with the text of the article and about how wonderful my blog is. I got like an electronic banner to put at the top of the blog that said, "Winner Best of DC 2014." I also got praise from a lot of other people, frankly.

Q: No hate mail because you were balanced and fair?

MCAULEY: No. Well, you know, you can't do anything without somebody objecting. I went to the guys who had done the first blog I'd written for, and the best advice they gave me was, if you're writing about politics, you should be emotionally prepared to be sued. I wasn't sued. But their advice was, you should make your blog an LLC. It's like its own corporation. So, if somebody sues you, the only thing they can do is they can take the LLC away from you.

Q: Oh, really.

MCAULEY: So, I started an LLC, which consisted of \$500 in a bank account. I had Google ads on the site and I occasionally got tiny, tiny infusions of cash, in one-hundred-dollar increments, based on people clicking on the ads. I tried to publish new content every business day and I did a pretty good job of that. I was able to take holidays off.

It was also good because, as office director, Susan was regularly working until nine or ten o'clock at night. And that's when these local council meetings were. I covered what they called ANCs, which is Advisory Neighborhood Commissions. They are the lowest level of government and you are elected but you don't get paid. But a lot of people who climbed up the slippery pole of DC local politics started off in the ANCs.

Q: Did you cover just your neighborhood or the whole city?

MCAULEY: Um, just my neighborhood. Just places I could walk to within my neighborhood.

Q: And you went to all these meetings?

MCAULEY: Yeah. But I mean, that was Logan Circle, Dupont Circle and Shaw and so they were—at that time—the happening places. Fancy new restaurants were pitching it, people wanting to develop, people wanting to knock down historic buildings to put up blocks and people are objecting to that, liquor licenses, pot dispensaries, and people wanting to slap extra stories on the back of their houses or enlarge them out back, and then their neighbors saying n. People all fight and there's a lot of bad feelings. My thing was that I just went to the meetings. I observed and I wrote down what they said, and I only said what went on in the meetings. I didn't editorialize. This was good, because anything that happened in the meeting was public knowledge. So, I could write about it. I didn't have to worry about permissions and things like that.

Q: And people appreciated it, right?

MCAULEY: I had very, very positive feedback. For example, I wrote a story where I talked about a lawyer who had been treated badly at a meeting. I just wrote about what exactly had happened. The lawyer called up to thank me and then he gave me a scoop that made his opponents look bad. The same thing when—these people are elected for terms of two years—there was an election while I was writing. Somebody sent me damaging information about one candidate. He's running for this local council position, but his neighbors actually had a restraining order on him.

Q: Did you publish your scoops?

MCAULEY: I did. I did. In the case I just told you about, I called up the guy. I said, "Somebody sent me a copy of a restraining order. Do you want to say anything?" And, you know, he said a few unwise things. Then he wised up and he said, "No comment." He told me, "You should wait until after the election to publish this." And I said, "No." That got a lot of attention and was even briefly mentioned in the Twitter feed of writers from bigger magazines and the Washington Post.

Q: Did you study journalism?

MCAULEY: I did study journalism.

Q: All right, so this was your first time actually working as a journalist.

MCAULEY: It was really like the first-year journalism courses. I tried to stick to who, what, when, where, why, and how. I put my blog motto as something like, 'say what happened and don't tell people what to think about it.'

Q: Did you get hooked on being a journalist?

MCAULEY: Well, actually when I came back to DC later, I did some writing for a much more popular DC blog called Popville. This is a guy who started a blog way back when it was really a revolutionary idea. He's still doing it today and apparently makes enough money to support his family, but he's really a one-man band. He's sort of controversial. Some people think he's sort of flip and insufficiently serious, and other people love him. He has a devoted group of commenters.

When I came back from Vietnam, I didn't want to start my own blog for reasons that I'll talk about later. I went to the guy who ran Popville, and I said, "Remember me, I'm this guy who used to do this? Can I send you some content?" He was thrilled. He didn't pay me, of course, but he was thrilled. I got a T-shirt and a hat for that gig, that's all. But I enjoyed doing it. I enjoyed seeing my name in print. I enjoyed the comments, you know, most of the time. I knew I was doing things right when people from the DC government would get upset at what I was writing.

Q: Oh my.

MCAULEY: For example, at one meeting, somebody from the DC government said at a meeting that it costs \$75,000 to open up a daycare center in DC. I put that statement in the article. Apparently people aren't supposed to know that it costs so much money to start a daycare center in DC because of all of the permits and regulations. A DC government employee tried, repeated times, to get me to retract that statement. They said, "It's not true." I said, "Fine, you can put a comment saying it's not true, but a person from your agency said it."

I did all that while teaching. I taught at ICLS [International Center For Language Studies], near the White House and also at a place called LADO Language Center, which is at Rosslyn. Work was sort of on and off and that was okay because if Susan decided she wanted to go on a vacation, I could just say, I can't work and there was no obligation, no need to find substitute teachers.

I think I mentioned that after my dad passed away in 2008, I taught my mother how to use Skype and I was continuing to Skype her every day. I'm sad to see now that nobody uses Skype because Skype was really an enormous part of my life for a long time. It helped me comfort my mother in her final years.

We went to Vietnam in 2015. September of 2014 was when we started Vietnamese language training. I've told you before, people should do anything possible to get language training. I'm fifty-four at that time and Vietnamese was the hardest language I've ever learned. I didn't do a very good job. The Vietnamese teachers were very, very serious so it wasn't my happiest language experience. But still, I learned Vietnamese and I got to know a lot of people. The spouses learning Vietnamese were grouped in the same class.

The first day of language training, all of the Foreign Services officers sit together. There was a lady sitting nearby whom I had met previously. She's a dependent spouse, and is sitting all by herself. I went over and brought her into the group. I said, come on, and sit with the cool kids. Right? I'm the only person who does that. Alleged diplomats who are supposed to have all these mad social skills, don't even see this lady. So, you know, I invite her to come and sit with the cool kids—we're all part of the team.

I learned a lot of Vietnamese. However I didn't even pretend that I was going to take the final exam.

Q: Susan said it was the hardest language she ever took too. That the tones are really hard.

MCAULEY: The tones are really hard. Maybe Susan told you, we felt that they made it unnecessarily difficult due to some cultural misconceptions. This is the thing I'm sure you've seen, where the teachers have an idea that a diplomat should speak a certain way. They should know elegant idioms and short quotations from famous writers.

Q: Memorizing phrases, so it comes out of your mouth easier.

MCAULEY: Right, right. I felt something in this case that I didn't feel during the other times I took language training, which was that teachers felt that teaching dependent spouses was sort of like the lower tier.

Q: That's too bad.

MCAULEY: But still, I had a great time. Actually, once I overwhelmed the Vietnamese teachers with my personal charm, talked about being a language teacher, stuff like that, they sort of respected teachers, so I turned them around after a little while.

I had another problem, which was in the middle of language training at Christmas time. My mother took a turn for the worse and I basically took a month off to be with her. I told you, one of the problems of being in the Foreign Service is taking care of your older relatives. I had a sister who was the primary caregiver. She and my mother—you know, mothers, daughters, women who can understand them, not me. Even when things were good, they fought with each other. Now when the health problems came in, everybody was tense and on edge. When my mother was in the hospital and it was clear that she was not coming out of the hospital, I went there for like ten days. For reasons which are too complicated to explain, except to say that American healthcare is a mess, my mother ended up — in spite of the fact that we lived in Syosset (you know where that is on Long Island) — in a hospital in Brooklyn. I stayed in the house and I commuted every day to Brooklyn to see her.

Q: Oh my, that is hard.

MCAULEY: My sister and I sort of had twelve-hour shifts. This was a difficult thing because my sister was convinced my mother was going to pull through this and come out of here. She was resisting palliative care. I wasn't arguing with her. Eventually, she relented and that was one day before she died. That was December eighteenth.

Q: I had a similar experience with my mom and my sister. You can get so invested in helping them get better, you resist things that will make the end easier. I think that's what happened with my sister.

MCAULEY: On the other hand, just about language training, if you're dealing with Asians and you're saying you are putting everything aside to deal with your aging parents, then they're completely on board for that. Filial devotion is extremely important for Vietnamese, so they understood completely. They were very nice about it.

Q: Very good. Was it just you and the other lady? Or were there other spouses?

MCAULEY: No, no, there were other spouses. I had a guy who was a very good friend of mine, but I haven't talked to him recently. His wife was deputy consular chief, and he was fluent in Russian. He clearly just had a real talent. He was my age. He had worked in Moscow for a long time. Soon, he moved up into the smart kids' class with my wife and I was in the other class, as I mentioned. Susan had a tremendously difficult time, especially

toward the end. I had to leave her alone, because she just studied all the time. Unlike the other languages we had taken, the Vietnamese failed several people and they had to delay their departure and take another four weeks.

Q: And Susan was going as deputy chief of mission and you can't wait that long.

MCAULEY: But she didn't want to pull rank. She wanted to pass on her own. That is just her personality. I think she passed strictly on the merits of her Vietnamese because she studied really hard. So, then we went to Hanoi. We got packed out of Fourteenth Street and then we moved into a fancy chic hotel nearby.

We had one of those nightmare moments you have in the Foreign Service. Twenty-four hours before we were supposed to leave, my passports were stolen out of my room.

If you have been married for decades, you have running gags in your life. We do, anyway. One of the running gags in our life was I always used the hotel safe. She never used the hotel safe. After this packout, we got to the hotel and we were tired and sweaty. I looked around and I didn't see the hotel safe. So, I just said to myself, I'm just going to leave my passport hanging here on the little holder from the coat hanger. I'm just not worrying. Susan saw the safe, but she's the one who never uses the safe, so she didn't mention it to me. We came back and the passport was missing. But luckily, we had taken a bunch of pictures of the packout at various times, and we saw where the passport had been. It was clear that it had been stolen.

We had a completely unsympathetic D.C. policeman. This policeman was mostly interested in wanting to classify the passport as lost instead of stolen so it wouldn't be on the statistics for stolen things in DC.

After that, my wife mobilized her connections and we got the special issuance agency to issue me a passport on Saturday morning.

Susan also contacted the Vietnamese Embassy, and fixed the issuance of a new visa. The Vietnamese can be very bureaucratic and unhelpful when they want to and they can also be incredibly lovely and helpful when they want to. Susan made them want to be helpful, so they just issued me a new visa and I left. I was sort of sad about this delay, actually, because Susan had a stopover in Hawaii for two days. I've never been to Hawaii, so I followed her and I was in Hawaii for twenty-four hours only. It was her second day of two and it was my only day. It all turned out okay. I still don't know what happened to my passports. But actually, it was all three passports. I have a diplomatic passport, a tourist passport, and I have Irish nationality by birth.

Q: You lost your Irish one too.

MCAULEY: I got my Irish one replaced in Hanoi. The Irish have an embassy there.

So, we went to Hanoi. We had a very nice house. I told you already that the DCM house in Sofia has a special place in my heart. It was just so wonderful, so beautiful. I didn't like the Hanoi house as much, even though it was perfectly lovely. The house in Hanoi was, of course, enormous. It had an enormous entertainment area on the first floor and we lived mostly on the second floor.

Q: So, was it like a French provincial kind of place?

MCAULEY: Architecture is not really my thing, so I can't answer that. I guess it had a modern vibe. You had a big long staircase up to the second floor. Maybe sort of like a French tropical villa. It had a patio.

Once we had bats in the house and we had to do the thing where we closed some doors and opened other doors. When the bat flew into the patio area, we closed those doors and left them overnight and by the morning they had found the hole in the patio roof to go out. But bats in the house was scary.

Generally speaking, I have had a wonderful relationship with all the people who worked in the houses where I lived. However, Hanoi was the worst in that respect.

The staff were a little nervous about a man around the house. There were three of them. They had a new house director. She had been the maid who had been promoted. She had just been promoted above her level of competence. I believe she had been a wonderful cook and a good maid.

Here's an example of a problem we had. One of the other members of the house staff had a soft spot for dogs. Our cat had died and we had no pets at that time. So, she brought dogs to the grounds of the house. I didn't mind, I didn't care. The only problem was she hid the dogs at night. For example, she would go home in the evening and lock the dog in the maid's room, which was in a separate building. We could hear the dog barking in the middle of the night. She continued to do stuff like this when we went on vacation and the RSO came to the house to check and found the dog. She would have gotten fired by the RSO but we essentially lied. We said she had our permission, which she didn't.

Q: For her to have the dog there or for her to stay there?

MCAULEY: To keep the dog there.

Q: I see.

MCAULEY: This same maid—this was actually a very sad thing—got scammed by a Nigerian, who posed as an English person and said I will marry you and take you away from Vietnam to England. She wised up and asked for my advice. I spoke to him on the phone and he was clearly not from London as he said. I could tell from speaking to him.

The scammer did the thing that scammers do. First, he got her to send a little bit of money. He said, "I'm going to send you an iPhone, because I love you so much. Send me \$600." She had previously sent him like fifty dollars for, I don't know, a down payment on the iPhone or whatever it was. She brought this to me, she showed me the picture of the guy, and she explained it to me. I said, "You're being scammed. I talked to the guy. He's never going to come for you. He's never going to take you away to England. He's not even English. The picture of the guy that he sent to you is somebody else." She cried and then she went away. We never spoke of it again.

Q: Did y'all do a lot of entertaining?

MCAULEY: Yes. I found myself useful as a dependent spouse in this case. We would have a reception at the house. At the beginning of the evening, Susan and I would both stand by the front door and greet people. Susan's very social, and there's always somebody she wants to talk to about something special. She would go off and talk to someone. I remained by the door and continued to welcome people to my home. I would say, "Susan was over there and help yourself to a drink." I stood by the door and welcomed people while she did business and hobnobbed and chit-chatted. So, I thought that was a useful thing that spouses could do, unglamorously—just make people feel comfortable the moment they're in the door.

Q: Very nice.

MCAULEY: I took language classes in Hanoi with the really, really smart guy, the other dependent spouse I mentioned earlier. The university was on the far side of town. They had classes for foreigners so I called him up. I said, "Leo, you want to take this?" He said, "Yeah, great." So, we took it together for a few months. We were there through the first Têt, that's the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. Then we didn't return after that but it was fun. It gave us something to do.

I was a little surprised because I felt I would be able to find a job easily in Vietnam. But I actually had a little difficulty finding a job. First, I worked teaching English at a business, which was not so far from my house, but the whole thing sort of fell apart. I had that problem you have occasionally in education, which is that people who are not educators are your boss, so they don't understand learning. They just wanted me to come after work, teach all the staff together, and make everybody fluent. I said, you have to test people, you have to put people in separate classes by level. The lowest person is different from the highest person and the highest person is going to be bored and they're not going to come to class. But I hung on for three or four months. After that, I found a job which turned out to be my regular job for the next year and a half, which was at a school that did preparation for IELTS [International English Language Testing System]. Should I explain what IELTS is?

Q: Yes, please.

MCAULEY: In America, we have the TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] exam. If you want to go to university in America, you have to take this. IELTS is the same thing for the British Empire.

Q: Are the standards different?

MCAULEY: They are. They're different tests. The TOEFL is completely computer based. The examinee never talks to a human being, just to a computer online. With IELTS you actually have to talk to a human being. It's administered by the British Council. The school was happy to have me because then young Vietnamese could practice talking to a native speaker. In this place, I was the first foreigner that the Vietnamese student ever talked to, in some cases. A lot of the students were junior high school or high school kids, mostly, and there were a few who were university level. I taught writing, I taught speaking, and I taught the interview section. For the interview section—I am six foot two, which makes me gigantic in an Asian context. So, I was especially scary for the Vietnamese high school students to speak to. But the students came in and they got more, if they could, comfortable speaking.

Q: I just flashed back to my little boy at three years old. His first preschool teacher was a big bear of a guy with a big bushy beard. Scotty was crying when I dropped him off, so I asked him if it got better after that. He said, "It was okay, but I don't like that scary one." He called him that for a week before he loved him. So, you were the scary one.

MCAULEY: Actually, it was completely understood by the Vietnamese that terror was part of the education process. There were a lot—as Susan I'm sure told you, Vietnamese

can be really, really smart. There were tremendously smart young people in my classes. In Vietnam, I felt like I was a happy and popular teacher, especially because I didn't have that whole Asian authority thing, where the students must be silent while the teacher talks. I just was a lot more relaxed. I felt like I spoke to people more on the same level as much as possible.

I had a writing class once a week. The writing class was supposed to be thirty people, but within like two weeks, word had gotten around and it ballooned into one hundred people.

Q: Have you taught writing before?

MCAULEY: Yes. But, you know, writing for beginners can be just writing a sentence or punctuating it correctly. This teaching was more challenging.

Something you have to do on the IELTS exam is write an essay. Sort of like, some people want to build a factory in your town, other people think it will add pollution, give your opinion for or against, and why you think that way. I think those sorts of writing assignments are completely artificial. But, you know, it's part of the gatekeeping test.

My class was tremendously popular, which, of course, I was very flattered about. The only problem is every week I had to correct one hundred essays and it ended up eating up every minute of my spare time. I mean, because it takes me ten or fifteen minutes to do each essay.

They had to unlearn stuff that Vietnamese teachers were telling them to do, like use long words. I said, "Use a short word you understand, not a long word you don't understand." I spent a tremendous amount of time correcting student papers.

Q: Did they have success? Was there any measure of whether or not you were a great teacher and getting them through the test?

MCAULEY: Well, a lot of them did very well on the IELTS.

One Vietnamese student of mine is still in Australia at the University of Brisbane. It's actually sort of one of the star students and he was a charming guy. He really latched on to me. The funny thing about being a teacher in Asia is there's a certain amount of masochism in the Asian personality, like, the more you tell them they're terrible and they're doing a horrible job, the more they love you. What they don't like is foreign teachers who come and do the American thing like, happy, self-esteem, 'oh, isn't that wonderful,' and good try participation award. The Vietnamese are not doing that.

Q: That's good. Yeah, that's what Susan said that they really wanted constructive criticism in her work too.

MCAULEY: So you tell them, this is terrible! They're like, thank you teacher. So, I did that for a year and a half.

Let's see, what else do I have? I tried to start a tradition of husbands' lunches and that worked about two or three times.

I don't understand women and I don't understand men. In the case of the husbands' lunches, men would come and they would be perfectly polite. Although there was always one or two people who spent the whole time telling you how the embassy was running incorrectly and the things they disliked about the embassy and the things the embassy was doing wrong. And you have to listen politely and say "Uh-huh"..

But—I talked about this often with Susan—in a case like this, after the event, women might send you a message saying, thanks for the lunch or thanks for planning that, can I help plan the next one? Men never do that. They come, they're happy, they eat, they say thanks, and they go home. So, after three or four times, I sort of gave up. Especially when I started having a situation where I had one hundred essays to correct every week.

Q: Right. But it sounds like there must have been a fair number of male spouses.

MCAULEY: Yes, there were.

Q: So, life was changing in the Foreign Service.

MCAULEY: And speaking of life changing in the Foreign Service, the US Ambassador in Vietnam, Ted Osius, was openly gay. He was married and had a partner there. Ted and his partner were extremely elegant people. His partner was African American and Ted is European. The partner was a Foreign Service officer on leave and he was studying to be a lawyer on the internet. So, people sometimes ask about your relationship with the Ambassador's wife or husband. He was perfectly nice to me. He was a lovely man. But he was really busy and also he just sort of was classier than me. I'm just this middle-class guy.

Q: He wasn't doing that community building thing that you were doing. That's interesting.

MCAULEY: One of the things that I did every week, this started right after I got there and continued up to literally the day before I left, was I did Friday morning conversation club at the American Library. That was a really good experience. Again, I ended up—especially in the summertime when there was no school or school was out—with an enormous number of people. It was sort of difficult to have a conversation club with 150 people. People started bringing their classes, teachers brought their classes. It was actually sort of touching. Parents brought their children.

I had at least one time where the mother asked the kid who was like eight, "What do you want to do for your birthday?" The kid said, "I want to go to the conversation club at the American Embassy!" She brought him and he loved it and he thought it was wonderful. He shook my hand and we had pictures taken together, and it was really touching. Conversation club was a little difficult for me, because I'm essentially introverted. But as you can tell, from how I'm acting now, I have a good line of chat once I get going. But when I was done with the Friday conversation club, I really wanted to go out to the car and just be quiet.

Q: Right. And, of course, the point is to get them to talk to each other.

MCAULEY: You are correct but, you know, I didn't do that. I didn't get people into groups and have them talk to each other. I tried to do that and it didn't work. A lot of people actually didn't want to talk, they wanted to come and hear a native speaker speak English. In the English teaching business, we call that the silent period. The students actually are understanding things. They just want to concentrate on their listening before they produce language. I had a lot of people like that. Then I started to develop half a dozen people who showed up regularly and always had questions and things that they wanted to talk about. So, I talked to half a dozen people and everybody else listened.

At the same time, after my first job fell through, I also had a volunteer job teaching English to some Catholic seminarians. Susan and I were born Catholic, but we go to Episcopal church now. But in Vietnam, they have a Catholic church with English language services. We felt more comfortable at the English-language service in the Catholic Church, so we went to the Catholic Church. We couldn't take communion, because we had been accepted into a Protestant church. We understood, that's the rules. The service in English was at ten o'clock on Sunday mornings.

The Vietnamese Catholic priest who did the English language service was a human rights contact of the embassy. He recognized us at the church. He visited the embassy regularly..

He put an announcement in the church bulletin, asking people, can anybody volunteer to be an English teacher for nuns? I think he was expecting a female volunteer but he got me.

Maybe they thought my rugged good looks would be too much of a temptation for nuns. In any case I got priests in training as students instead. First, I got a big group of like twelve or fifteen guys, who took a class every week. They were going to be priests in Vietnam. Then I got this group of four guys and they were coming to America. They were going to get university-level English prep in the USA and then go to seminary for four years. They're still here now. I just emailed one of them this morning because every three months or so, my wife and I and the four of them have a Zoom call.

Q: Oh, nice.

MCAULEY: Now, two of them are studying at a seminary in rural Indiana and the other pair is studying in a seminary in Pittsburgh. Back in Vietnam, I was the first native speaker of English that taught them.

The poor guys wanted to go back to Vietnam to see their families but then COVID happened. Now they are stuck here.

So, these guys were pretty good friends of mine. That was something that was very satisfying. Volunteering at the library was also very satisfying. What else? I'm looking at my notes here and I wrote, the higher your spouse gets, the more difficult it is to contact them at the job. Whenever I needed to talk to Susan I had to make an appointment. The secretary was very protective. I wanted to say to my wife's secretary, "But we're married!"

Q: It's a really big job. I was DCM twice, but my embassies were small. Hers was a huge job. So, it wasn't so much that they're over protective, it's just she was really busy.

MCAULEY: We lived in the foreigner ghetto area of Hanoi. All the stores had foreign food and catered to foreigners. You had the ridiculous situation where I'd walk into the store and I wanted to speak Vietnamese and the Vietnamese wanted to speak English. The result was: I spoke bad Vietnamese and they spoke bad English. Eventually I gave up and spoke English because the Vietnamese are very stubborn. Don't try to out-stubborn a Vietnamese.

Q: Were there kinds of food and stuff that you would always be really excited to find or that you can only find in a certain store?

MCAULEY: When we had been in Eastern Europe in the '80s and '90s, finding Western food in a store was a cause for celebration, now it's just one big world, you can get almost anything anywhere. We had good internet connectivity in Vietnam and we could get anything we wanted on the internet.

The only thing I really wanted was clean air, which we didn't have. They have the People's Republic of China levels of air pollution. The smartphone app that told you the air quality was something you looked at least twice a day.

In every embassy, it seemed that there was always one section that the DCM spent an enormous amount of time administering. I told you, in Bulgaria, it was the American School. In Laos, it was the people who did repatriation of remains. In Vietnam, it was PEPFAR [U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief].

Q: Which is the HIV/AIDS initiative?

MCAULEY: Yes, HIV/AIDS. I forgot what the acronym stands for. First word is president's, I remember. The person in Washington running it, who Susan had a lot of dealings with, was Deborah Birx, who eventually was one of President Trump's public faces on coronavirus.

Q: Oh, interesting. Was she at the embassy or was she working from the States?

MCAULEY: She was in Washington, hollering at Susan on the telephone. The reason PEPFAR was a problem, if I understand correctly, was first of all PEPFAR was far away from the rest of the embassy in an office building on the other side of town. And PEPFAR was an interagency thing. So, you have people with all these different government agencies, and they didn't play well together. Susan spent a lot of time dealing with that, until late in the evening

Susan would have them all over to our house for dinner. Before they arrived, I told Susan, "I hate these guys because they're always taking you away from me." At dinner, Susan said, "My husband hates you because you're not playing together and you take up so much of my time." I said, "Yeah, that's true."

That embarrassed me but maybe it helped the PEPFAR staff understand that their behavior had consequences. Of course, as individuals, they were very nice. Susan eventually got everybody in PEPFAR working together more harmoniously.

Q: So, I don't understand, why are there so many people involved in PEPFAR?

MCAULEY: PEPFAR had like one person from maybe six different agencies. I'm not sure why it was structured that way.

Susan wished, at times, that Dr. Birx was not so demanding. But Susan also recognized that Dr. Birx was doing a good job.

Other things a dependent spouse does. When the post language program has an out of town trip, the DCM goes to show support for the program, as well as improve her own language skills. We went on out of town trips from Hanoi. That means you have to wake up at the crack of dawn and ride in a van to the middle of nowhere in northern Vietnam and speak only Vietnamese. You had a really long day. You spent a lot of time in a car.

We were only in Vietnam for two years. The second year, the out-of-town language immersion trip was the weekend after Donald Trump had won the presidency. I also was sick as a dog. And I was feeling bad because of the results of the election. Susan felt that she had to go. Am I going to stay home by myself and mope—I had bronchitis—or am I going to go? I went and I was miserable. A Vietnamese told me that I resembled Trump, and I almost bit his head off.

Q: Yeah, you have bronchitis, you stay home.

MCAULEY: My wife is the person who never stays home when she has bronchitis. She actually flew back from Vietnam to a conference with Dr. Birx when she had bronchitis and I begged her not to leave. I actually was really angry when she left. But she did it. She lived. She came back. I don't mention it to her now because it still rubs me the wrong way, and what's past is past. But that's okay. If that's the worst thing that happens in your marriage, it's not so bad.

One time she was the busiest and I just gave up on seeing her at all was when Obama came to visit Hanoi. Obama's visit was a tremendous success.

The funniest thing about it was that in my thirty-five years of Foreign Service, the thing that had the best security was Anthony Bourdain's TV show. You may remember that Anthony Bourdain came and he did a show where he and Obama sat down in what looks like a normal Hanoi storefront restaurant with plastic chairs. Together, they eat real authentic Vietnamese street food. Bourdain came, but his shoot with Obama was so secret my own wife couldn't tell me.

Q: Oh, how interesting. She had told me that because the president was saying no to a dinner with the Vietnamese in his honor and so they had to keep that secret. But it turned out okay.

MCAULEY: Susan correctly told the Vietnamese that the country is going to look so good on Bourdain's TV show. She said to her contacts: Wow, you guys aren't going to believe how much good publicity this is going to give the country. Because Anthony Bourdain was so cool.

Oh, that also reminds me, I was almost in the movies again in Vietnam. Hollywood came to film "King Kong" with Samuel L. Jackson and a lot of other famous actors.

I answered a Facebook ad and I was chosen to stand in as the body double for an actor in this movie. who is relatively famous, a comic actor named John C. Reilly. Then Reilly bowed out of the film. It was very embarrassing because I actually had quit a teaching job that I was working on. I was really, really excited about going out to the middle of nowhere, with all these actors and being there for a month. Then they called me and they said, "Now this guy has bowed out of the film, we don't need you." They gave me twenty-five dollars in Vietnamese currency as compensation. I was so sad. Oh my God. Well, the movie turned out to be a bit of a turkey.

Right after that happened, there was a big reception for the cast of the movie at the ambassador's house. We went and I saw Samuel L. Jackson, John Goodman, and some others. John Goodman seems like a guy who you would really enjoy knowing, but he was quite unfriendly. I understand Goodman had avoided the draft in Vietnam and he felt very uncomfortable returning. Goodman also had trouble standing for long periods, so he was uncomfortable at the reception.

There were actually one or two young actors there who were friendly. By coincidence, about two weeks previously Susan and I had seen these young African American actors in a movie. It was a movie that was showing in a semi underground film club run by an expatriate in Hanoi. It was a biopic of a rap group. NWA was the name of the rap group. NWA stands for something I don't want to say. WA is "with attitude."

Before we saw it, Susan said to me, we have literally gone to see movies about Mongolian shepherders, but we wouldn't go see a movie about a black rap group. This was about the time of Oscars so white and stuff like that. So we went and we saw it and it was a good movie.

Then two weeks later, there's two of the guys who played members of the rap group. I greeted one of them with the name of the character, "Hey Eazy E!" He looked at me in shock because I'm the whitest looking white person around, right? He said, "You've seen my movie?" "Yeah, I've seen your movie. It showed here." "It showed here?" – this information shocked him.

We had a great time chatting. He was really charming. At the end of the evening he said, "Let me shake your hand." I stuck my hand out like a white person and he said, "No, no, brother, lean in! Lean in!" I didn't know how to shake hands in this manner, so we had a good laugh. I said, "This is not the way of my people."

Q: You have a new friend.

MCAULEY: A lot of the people who were in production were quite charming. Somebody recognized me as the guy who lost the position working on the film. He apologized to me.

Another thing I did as a dependent spouse was, I tried to take little jobs off Susan's plate when I could. One was that we had a driver. Susan, of course, had an embassy driver to take her back and forth to work and receptions only. Never for personal travel on the weekends. Susan was very much about staying within the box on that.

Q: You have to be.

MCAULEY: She wanted to have a driver for these other times and also for me. I dealt with the driver's admin paperwork. Susan gave me a copy of the standard contract. I set up the contract. I made it clear to him—you're employed by me. I pay you but sometimes Susan will ask you for a ride. He got that right away. So, that was just one little thing that Susan didn't have to worry about.

After twenty-three months in Hanoi, Susan was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Her mother died of ovarian cancer. She had an uncomfortable feeling down there and she decided to get it checked. At first, she went to the local clinic for foreigners. On the basis of her lab results, the Embassy sent her to Singapore. When the diagnosis was confirmed, she called me from Singapore in tears. That was it, her tour was over. They wanted to fly her directly back to the US, but she managed to get permission to come back and have one more day in Hanoi to gather up her stuff. Then we were both gone. I have to say that MED [i.e., the State Department Medical Unit] did good by us. There was a transit apartment available in Crystal City when we arrived and we moved right in.

First, the State Department Med Unit recommended Georgetown University Hospital, but Georgetown University Hospital was a big, soulless urban hospital and Susan didn't like the way the doctor talked to her.

Susan had worked closely with the American nurse-practitioner in Hanoi. When the visit to Georgetown Hospital didn't go well, Susan contacted her and said, "We had a terrible experience. What are we going to do?" The nurse practitioner pulsed the nurse network in Washington for advice, and came back with a recommendation for the gynecological oncology section at Sibley Hospital in northwest DC. She ended up going there for treatment.

That year, 2017, Fourth of July fell on a Tuesday. On Monday, the third, almost everything was closed, but the specialist in this type of surgery made time to see her. When everything else was closed. We were very grateful. This specialist didn't do anything except the type of surgery that Susan needed. He said, "I do this twice a week. The other doctor you saw maybe does this surgery twice a year. He's a perfectly competent surgeon, but I've done this more often. We can fix this."

Q: That's what she needed to hear. Her mother died of that.

MCAULEY: Yes. I remember eight days later she went into surgery. I remember it was Susan's sixtieth birthday. From then, we just took it day by day. After surgery, she was in the hospital for a long time. My wife's best friend from high school came up from Austin to help me with caretaking.

My wife tends to be—when she's not feeling well, she doesn't want to talk to anybody, including her husband. She just wants to be by herself. So, she was doing that. But I said, you will benefit from visitors. So, I put up a piece of paper on the wall of her hospital room and I scheduled for her visitors. She loved it because she's an extrovert. When visitors came, they sat around gossiping about the State Department. Susan forgot about her troubles. They talked about who is doing what to whom. She had a great time. I actually left the room and let her talk about State Department gossip till the world looked level.

For the record, my wife is still alive and healthy today.

When we came back to the US this time, our tenants had not signed a lease for an additional year. So, it was July and the lease was over at the end of August, and I said, "We have to move back into our house." (This is where we are today.) At first, Susan was reluctant. She wanted to do the thing where we moved back into DC and had fun. I

said, "You are having cancer, right? Don't think about fun. We're going to move into our house, you're going to have a lot of space to set up the things you want and you can make it beautiful." Then she did that woman thing where one day, she just agreed with me. She just changed her mind. One day, I said, "I'm sorry, I have to return to this topic, but we really have to move into our house." And she said, "I agree." I was speechless.

Q: How'd that happen?

MCAULEY: I was her caregiver for a long time. I loafed on returning to work. Eventually, it was clear that I would have a little extra time. But I didn't want to rush into a full-time job out in the world. I got an online job. I said to myself, "I'm just going to do this for a couple of weeks." It's three years later and I'm still doing it. I'm teaching English online, mostly to Japanese people. South Koreans and other nationalities, too, but mostly to Japanese people.

Q: Do you use zoom? Or what do you use?

MCAULEY: Actually, the company has its own platform.

Q: I see.

MCAULEY: First we used to use Skype, but the company set up its own platform. Every day, before and during the entire pandemic, I've mostly worked seven days a week.

Q: Wow. And this time you're making some money I bet.

MCAULEY: Actually, the money is not so good. It's five dollars per class, that's ten dollars an hour, which is still above the minimum wage. But I really enjoy it because I'm here in the house. Right next to me, on the other side of the wall, is my washing machine. So, I can put something in the washing machine and teach for an hour and then put it in the dryer and teach for another hour. Then I have clean clothes. Similarly, when I need to go to the toilet, I never have to worry about the bathroom being occupied. So, three years later, I'm still doing it. Susan calls it Uber for language teaching. So, you just open up hours when you want to teach and people book it.

Q: Interesting.

MCAULEY: I hope I don't sound too arrogant, I've been very popular as a teacher. I get very high ratings from students. Usually, my classes fill up twenty-four hours in advance.

Q: So, you've been teaching for some twenty years now?

MCAULEY: Yes.

Q: Plus, you started with a lot more education in education than many.

MCAULEY: A lot of my students currently are educated people who live in Japan. We talk about foreign affairs and politics regularly. As a result, I now take more interest in Japan than the average person. I occasionally read a Japanese novel. I see a Japanese movie. Whatever it is, I can talk to my students about it. We have a classic movie service and so yesterday we watched a Japanese gangster film from 1961. I mentioned it to my students today and I sent them a link to the movie poster in Japanese, which I found on the internet. They were amazed that I took an interest in this.

I did this for a while. Just about the time when I said to myself, I should get a better paying job, maybe teaching face to face, I was also diagnosed with cancer.

Q: David, I wasn't expecting that.

MCAULEY: I figured Susan didn't mention that. A completely different type of cancer, obviously, I am not eligible for ovarian cancer. I have something called hairy cell leukemia, which, spoiler alert, it's in remission and I'm completely fine. But it was a big surprise to me because my father lived to be eighty-five and my mother lived to be eighty-nine. I wasn't expecting cancer so soon.

When I came back from overseas with Susan after her cancer diagnosis, I spent a lot of time on the internet. I asked myself: What should I do? One site on the internet said, if you are a caregiver, make sure your own health is in order. So, I said, "Okay," and I went to a guy who was my GP and I was fine.

Then six months later, I went back to him. He took a blood test and he said, "These blood numbers are weird." We waited three months, he did another blood test and they were still weird. He said: "You have to go to Sibley Hospital and see an oncologist." They diagnosed me with hairy cell leukemia, which is an extremely rare form of leukemia. There are less than 1,000 new cases in the US every year.

One of the good things about this type of cancer is that it's easy to treat and very slow moving. One of the bad things about this type of cancer is that doctors say to you, "You're lucky to have this type of cancer because it's easy to treat and it's slow moving." But I don't feel lucky.

Q: Is the treatment yucky?

MCAULEY: No, it's much easier than most cancers. Susan, her hair fell out. My hair didn't fall out. Since this type of cancer has been identified in the 80s, four or five different medicines have been developed to treat this.

The oncologist said to me, "Okay, you have a choice between medicine A and medicine B. Medicine B would take a longer time, but it seems like it is gentler on the body." I chose medicine B.

The second time I took medicine B, I had an allergic reaction. I was—a new word I learned— neutropenic, which means your body doesn't have white blood cells to fight infection. I had to go to the hospital and be in a completely clean room. They pumped me full of antibiotics and other stuff. That was it for medicine B and then we went back to medicine A. Medicine A worked correctly. Treatment was once a day for five days. Then six months after that I had medicine C, which is the normal treatment. You get one medicine, your body recovers, then they slam it with another medicine. The second treatment finished four weeks before the pandemic started—that was my last chemotherapy treatment.

My wife and I have these matching ports embedded in our chests. You have to get a little operation to get a port, so infusions go more easily. So, they give you sedation, you don't go to sleep, but you're feeling good.

The surgeon was a Russian from Belarus. So, I spoke to him in fractured Russian that I learned in Moldova in my altered state. The nurse went out to reassure Susan and said, "Your husband is speaking Russian to the surgeon." Susan said: "Of course, he is."

I've been officially declared in remission. Susan has actually been in remission and actually had to go back and get more medicine. So, you know, we've got everything in common, right?

Q: Check.

MCAULEY: I had a Coronavirus vaccine. Susan and I were able to get a vaccine earlier because of our maladies. The only problem is, because I have blood cancer, the Coronavirus vaccine may not actually work. So now I'm part of a study of blood at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda.

Q: Because you don't have that immune system.

MCAULEY: We got the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, which works differently than the Pfizer vaccine. I don't know. Nobody knows what's going to work.

Q: So, you decided to move?

MCAULEY: Yes, we're moving to Texas. Susan is from Texas. She's actually from El Paso. But we visited Austin a bunch of times. I've been there twelve or fifteen times in my adult life. I never went to Texas before I met her.

Years ago, we talked about what we are going to do when we retire. For a while, we were thinking of retiring to Thailand because I liked it so much. But alas, after we left Thailand fell apart. Now it seems like we were there at the high watermark of stability and sane behavior. So that's sad, because Thailand was really nice, and we really liked the amount of Americans who live there as retirees.

After my mom passed away, we moved to Vietnam. My sister, who was the executor of the will, did everything and sold my mother's house in Syosset. Even though it was a little old person's house who hadn't had any upkeep in decades, it still sold for an incredible lump of money. My sister, I don't always agree with her, but she's completely honest as the day is long. We never had any arguments about money. She split the money fifty fifty. So, I had \$200,000.

At the time, it was the second Tết we were planning to spend in Vietnam. We discovered at the previous Lunar New Year that nothing happens in Hanoi during the holiday. Everybody goes home. So, what are we going to do? Susan says, "Well, I have to stay here." So, just like I told you earlier today, we had another one of those conversations that start with, "Don't say no right away." And she said, "Don't say no right away. How about retiring to Austin?" I had remarked not long before that Austin was a place where I had felt very comfortable with because Austin was full of people like me, gray haired guys who never really figured out what they wanted to do when they grew up. So, Susan asks: what about Austin? I said, "Okay." And so, we agreed, okay, you're going to stay here in Hanoi and I'm going to fly to Austin and I'm going to buy a house.

Q: Oh, you did this from Vietnam.

MCAULEY: Yes, I actually flew back first to Seattle. Then after I got over my jet lag, I flew to Austin. A friend of my wife's best friend from high school was a real estate agent. I met her. She was lovely. She showed us a lot of places. We had also done a tremendous

amount of research online. Susan had said, you know, here's a bunch of addresses that looked promising. At the end of two days in Austin, I decided on a place. I called Susan on the other side of the world. She agreed. I sent her pictures. When possible, I gave her live video or otherwise I just described things. So, she had in some sense seen the place.

We decided on a condo unit. So I said to the real estate agent, "Okay, this is the one I want." She said, "I recommend giving them their asking price because there's somebody else who's interested in bidding." We bid their asking price and our offer was accepted.

Q: But that was two or three years ago?

MCAULEY: That was 2017.

Q: So, four years ago, so probably a pretty good deal.

MCAULEY: Yeah, and even though we felt like, of course, it was very expensive, it's all worth more now. We get emails from brokers all the time saying, "Sell your condo today."

Q: What are you going to do with all the stuff?

MCAULEY: Uncle Sam gives us one more move. We examined this very closely, you get one last move up to one year after retirement. It's one reason why we're pushing ahead with moving, even though I'm not one hundred percent sure that my COVID vaccine will take, we're just going to go ahead and do it.

We just bought a new car. We traded in our twelve-year-old car for a new car. We paid cash for it. We bought the new car because we're driving down there; we're starting four weeks from today. We have hotel reservations at Virginia Tech, Nashville, Hot Springs, Texas. Then we go there and we take possession of the apartment on the first working day of May.

Q: And not so much the State Department moving you but I have this five bedroom house and I'm thinking about—actually I got a decorator for the first time when I returned to just help me a little bit with the display of all my collections. I have a musical instrument collection and rugs and this and that.

MCAULEY: Susan has collections. I'm not so much into collections. I mean, I have sentimental things I enjoy, but not so much into collections. Of course, when we had an

enormous DCM house, we had the space to put everything. Then we came back here, and we didn't have so much space. Things are a little crowded.

My wife long ago had a slight hoarder mentality. She really has gotten away from that. Susan told me, "That's your influence." Because I am the exact opposite. Actually, my family was like this too. I'm actually really happy when I'm getting rid of stuff. We have a much easier time about this issue than most people because Susan's been very reasonable about getting rid of stuff. I haven't complained about the stuff that remains.

Q: So, you're going to move out there and that'll be it? You won't be back?

MCAULEY: Probably not. I mean, we've got to drive out there, take possession of the apartment, get some rented furniture, move back here, pack out. Actually, one of the things we're doing this evening is we're having a Zoom call with the real estate agent who will sell the house. She also managed the house for the years that we were gone. I'm very comfortable with her. She wouldn't rip us off. All the renovation of the inside of the house, the painting, refinishing, the floors, all of the little things that I'm too lazy to repair, all of that stuff is happening after we leave.

Q: Okay, but you'll be coming back after you drive out? You'll be coming back in order to pack up?

MCAULEY: Right. I think probably in the age of Zoom, we probably don't need to be physically present to sign the documents to sell the house. But if we do come back again, no problem. If we don't, that'd be fine too.

MCAULEY: So, do I have like one last question?

Q: All right. So, I guess, two questions. First of all, what is your overall view of the whole experience that you all have had with the State Department? And then the second question is, what advice do you give new people?

MCAULEY: I had a wonderful life thanks to the State Department. It's really impossible for me to imagine, having had a more enjoyable life trajectory than I've had. I was sort of a slacker. I didn't really expect to have this much glamor and fun and travel in my life. When younger, I really was sort of terrified that I would be stuck in a dead-end job my entire life, but I wasn't. It was wonderful. I occasionally run into people, especially women, who say, "Oh, you did such a great thing. You made a great sacrifice for your wife." It's like, no way. No sacrifice. This is what I did because I didn't want to work for a living. I feel like I have acted completely selfishly in many ways.

I guess the advice I would give is that if your spouse comes to you and says, "Let's have this adventure," don't say no. Don't say, I have to have a career. Don't say, I have to work nine to five in an office somewhere. Say, hell yeah, I'll quit everything and throw it over because that's the best thing to do.

Q: It worked out wonderfully for you. So, I know, one persistent advice you've had throughout these interviews has been to take language training and take your opportunities.

MCAULEY: It's a great opportunity to learn. People who arrive without any language skills are pretty unhappy. Plus everybody I know who's been on separate maintenance allowance has been pretty unhappy. I just couldn't imagine having done something like that. At one point I thought I wanted to be in the Foreign Service too. We would have separate tours and stuff, but then when it started to be even slightly real in the sense of passing the written Foreign Service exam, I realized I don't want to do that. I've always been pretty weird. So, I don't know if anybody else is going to feel the same way.

Q: That's the nice thing about the changing Foreign Service is that there have been a lot of models and a lot of different ways to go. You sound extremely devoted and very, very creative.

MCAULEY: My wife has also been extremely indulgent of me. She put up with me. I complained when she worked late. Then I realized you shouldn't do that. She had confidence that if you gave me a little space, I would come around to the right opinion eventually and I did.

Q: That's wonderful. So, I think if you have any other further thoughts feel free to put them in later. Unless there's anything else you want to say I'm going to end the recording now.

MCAULEY: Okay.

End of interview